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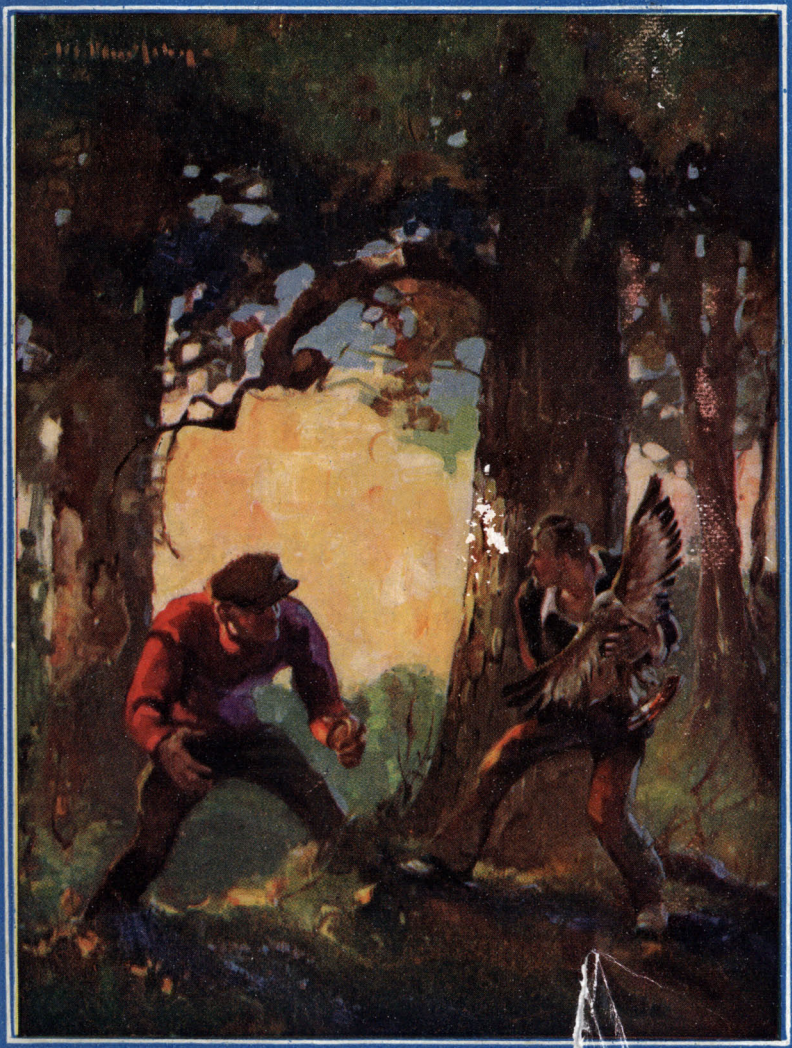

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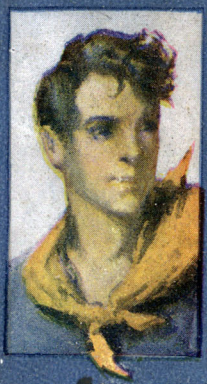

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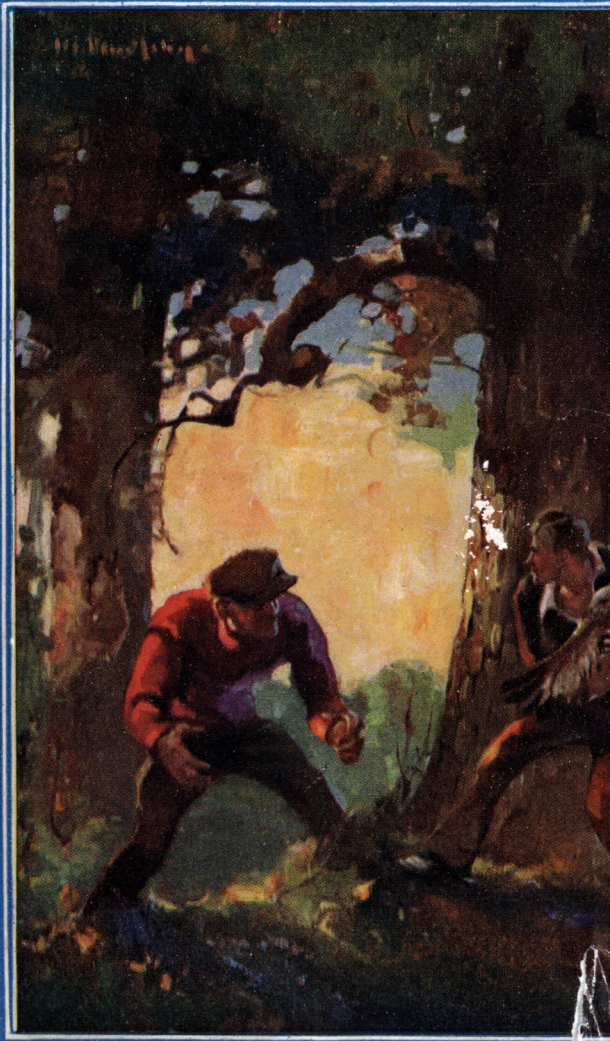

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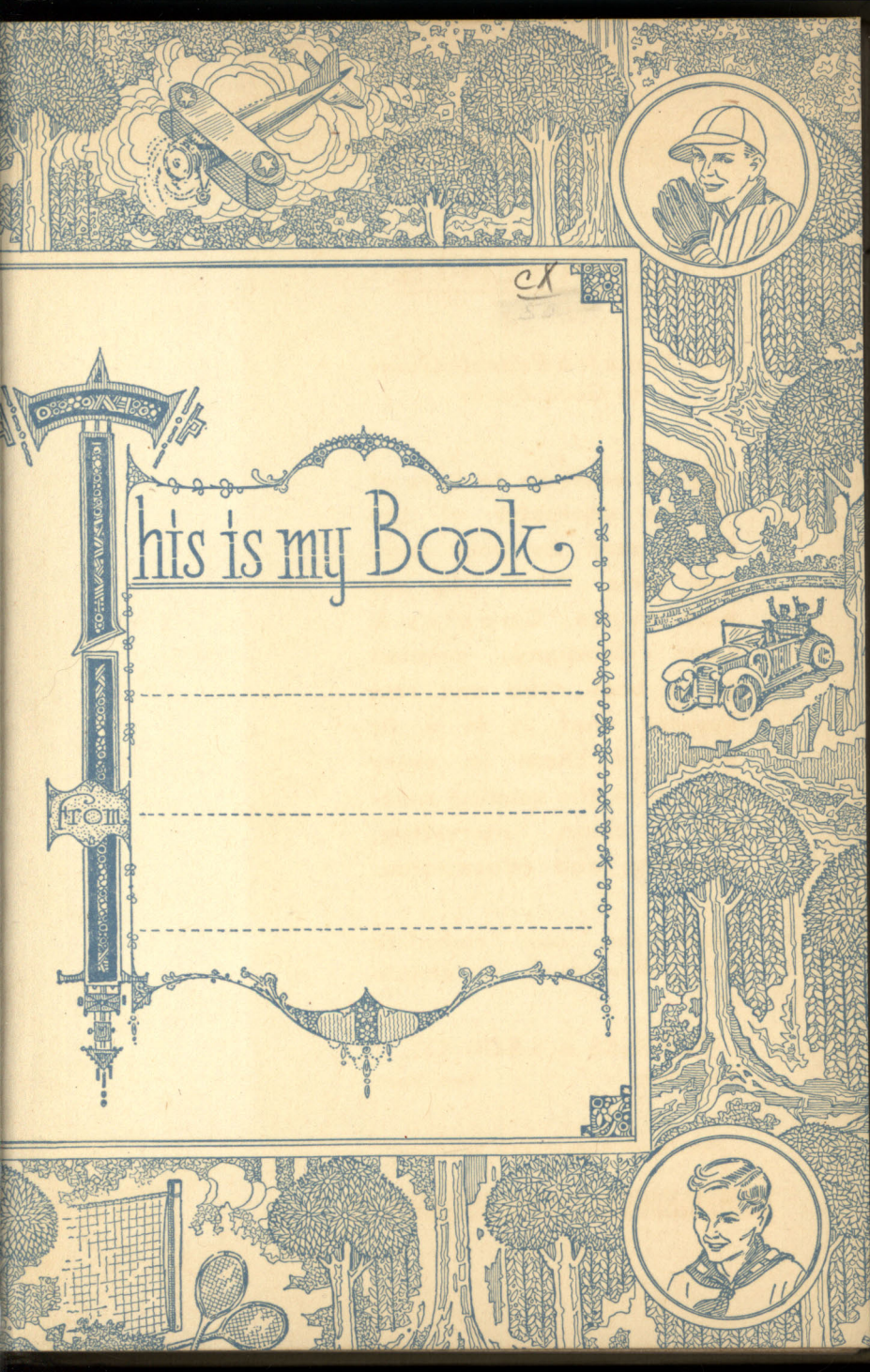
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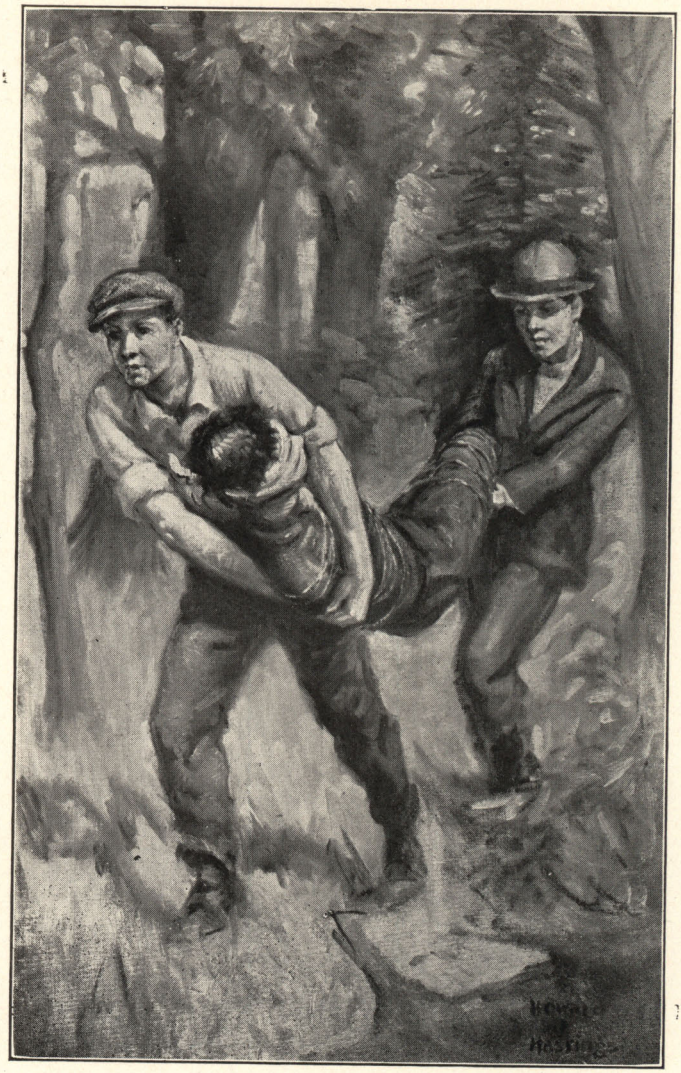

THE BOUND LAD WAS CARRIED SOME LITTLE DISTANCE.

Bob Dexter, Club House Mystery *Page* 178

BOB DEXTER AND THE CLUB HOUSE MYSTERY

OR

The Missing Golden Eagle

By

WILLARD F. BAKER

Author of "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery," "Bob Dexter and the Storm Mountain Mystery," "The Boy Ranchers," "The Boy Ranchers in Camp," etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Visit from Vandals	1
II.	The Golden Eagle	12
III.	In Disguise	21
IV.	Old Marietta	33
V.	A Call for Help	45
VI.	Flickering Flames	63
VII.	The Man with the Gun	71
VIII.	On the Bike Trail	80
IX.	The Lonely House	87
X.	Bob Is Caught	101
XI.	Golden Feathers	109
XII.	An Attack in the Dark	116
XIII.	Captives	126
XIV.	Bob Shadows	148
XV.	Strange Talk	156
XVI.	Hempen Bonds	163
XVII.	Stumpy to the Rescue	170

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVIII.	Bob's Escape	176
XIX.	A Strange Discovery	184
XX.	Wrong Feathers	197
XXI.	Stumpy's Alarm	205
XXII.	The Voodoo	211
XXIII.	The Fight	217
XXIV.	Startling News	225
XXV.	Happy Days	233

BOB DEXTER AND THE CLUB HOUSE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

A VISIT FROM VANDALS

"THINK we're going to beat them, Harry?"

"Sure we are, Ned! Why, it will be a walk-over!"

Ned Fuller looked at his curly-haired chum and laughed a full, ringing peal of merriment that echoed back and forth in the patch of woods through which the boys were journeying. A light breeze, blowing across beautiful Lake Netcong, fanned the faces of the lads.

"What are you giggling at?" demanded Harry Pierce. "Got a funny paper stuck in one of your pockets?"

"Funny papers? No, I was laughing at you! You're funny enough!"

"How come?" and Harry caught Ned by the arm and playfully drew back his fist, pretending to be about to strike him.

"Your saying that our *rowing* race with the Net-

cong club would be a regular *walk-over*—that struck me as being funny!" chuckled Ned. "How you going to walk on water?"

"Oh, you don't need to draw a map of it," asserted Harry, smiling at what he had said. "That was only a figure of speech—the kind Miss Martin used to make us do in our school composition work."

"School composition work! Don't talk about such stuff!" fairly shouted Ned. "Don't you know this is vacation time and we don't have to open a musty old book for another two months? Forget it, old scout and hump along or we'll miss the practice!"

"All right—I'm with you," asserted Harry. "But, all the same, walk away, sail away, motorboat away or any old way you like, our club is going to beat the Netcong lads, and don't you forget it!"

"I don't want to," said his chum. "If we win the race this time it means that we keep the gold cup trophy forever. And it's some trophy, boy, believe me!"

"You let something get away from you that time, old topper! It sure will look fine with our other cups and things at the club house. Say, look, there goes Martin Sill!"

He pointed along the path, amid the trees toward where a rather stout lad was walking along with a shuffling gait. As yet he had not seen the two chums who were so eagerly discussing the coming

boat race between the Boys' Athletic Club of Cliffside, and the Netcong Rowing Club of Netcong, a small town on Lake Netcong, not many miles from the suburban city of Cliffside.

"I see Martin, but it doesn't give me any great amount of pleasure," remarked Ned. "Not half the fun I'll get out of wrapping myself around one of Tim's ice cream sodas."

"That's right—a soda won't go so badly when we get to the club house. But speaking of Martin, if you want to see something funny wait a minute! Come on—follow me! I've got an idea!" and Harry lowered his voice.

"Don't let it get away—they're as scarce as hens' teeth!" retorted his chum. "What is it?"

Harry whispered something, at which Ned chuckled, and then the latter set off on a quick pace through the woods, taking a side path that would, by means of a short cut, bring him out ahead of the slower-moving Martin. On his part Harry quickened his progress so that he was soon within hailing distance of the other lad.

"Oh, Martin!" he called, and the stout lad turned.

"Well?" he asked, and there was little of jollity or good fellowship in his voice.

"Going to the club house?" asked Harry, coming to a halt, at which Martin did the same, turning

about so that he faced in the opposite direction from that he had been lately traveling.

"Club house? No, I'm not going there!" and Martin fairly snapped out the words. At another time Harry might have thought the tone of voice unusual, to say the least. But he was, at this moment, so intent on what was about to take place, that he gave little heed to anything save the joke that was imminent.

"Not going to the club house?" asked Harry, in real surprise. "Why, the crew is going out for its last practice spin before the race, and——"

"Aw, what do I care?" Martin was about to turn away to resume his progress, but at this moment a face and form emerged cautiously from the green bushes behind him. It was the face and form of Ned Fuller, who, a short time previous, had left Harry in such a hurry. Seeing his chum, there came half a grin over the face of Harry Pierce.

"Oh, so you don't care to see the crew practice, eh?" asked Harry. "Well, suit yourself, only I thought——"

At this moment Ned stooped down directly behind Martin, assuming a position on his hands and knees and holding himself in readiness. Harry had spoken loudly to cover any noise Ned might make in emerging from the bushes, but Ned had played this joke before and knew how to move almost as silently as the proverbial Indian.

"Of course it's all right," went on Harry, and Martin was now gazing curiously at him, for Harry's voice and his rather inconsequential talk betokened that something unusual was afoot. Martin was beginning to get suspicious. He did not have an alert and quick mind, and it took ideas longer to filter through his brain than through the heads of most boys. But he was too late.

Harry put forth a firm hand and pushed against Martin's chest. The stout lad was thrown off his balance and went toppling over the waiting back of Ned who was crouching behind him. Down went Martin's head, up went his heels and Ned, rising, rolled the lad off his back and to the ground, where he fell into a soft clump of ferns and grass.

The spot had been well chosen—even a baby would not have been harmed by such a gentle fall, and the two conspirators knew this before they carried out their joke.

Martin went down with a grunt, for he was, as I have said, a heavy lad, and the breath was jarred out of him. But aside from the shock and a little shaking up, he wasn't hurt. He lay still for a moment while the ringing laughter of Ned and Harry echoed through the woods. Then Martin arose and there was a look on his scowling face that wasn't good to see.

I am not defending Ned and Harry in what they did. I have played this same joke myself on un-

suspecting lads, and I have had it worked on myself. It doesn't really do any harm, when properly carried out, except, perhaps, to the victim's dignity. And I am not recommending that any of you lads try this. I am only telling what happened.

Martin arose with a look of anger—so much anger that, at first, he could not speak, and indeed, his scowling face was a surprise to the perpetrators of the joke. They expected that he would have taken it in better spirit.

But, as a matter of fact, he seemed about to rush at Harry and attack him. Indeed, had it not been that Ned quickly took his place at his chum's side, thus making the odds too much for a lad of Martin's prowess with his fists, the latter might have let fly at the youth who had pushed him over.

However, if he held himself back from physical action, he did not put a stopper on his tongue.

"I'll fix you for this!" he fairly yelled. "I'll get square with you two for this, all right! I'll make you wish you'd never done this!"

His face was flushed with rage, and he shook both fists in the faces of Ned and Harry. The latter, seeing that the joke had miscarried in a measure, tried to smooth matters over.

"Oh, come now, Martin, old man," soothed Harry. "It was only in fun! You aren't hurt! Come on to the club house and I'll buy you a soda! Forget it! We just wanted to have some fun——"

"Fun! It's a queer idea of fun you have! Go on! I don't want anything more to do with you! Get out or I'll—I'll—" Rage choked him. He didn't seem to know what he would do.

Then Ned tried his hand. He advanced as though to slip an arm, in friendly fashion, over the shoulders of Martin. But the latter mistook the action.

"Don't you touch me!" he shouted. "If you try any more of your dirty tricks——"

"I wasn't going to touch you," spoke Ned easily. "I was just going to brush some dirt off your coat. Come on to the club house. I'll buy you a soda also—that makes two."

"I wouldn't take a soda from you if I never had one!" spluttered Martin. "And I'll get square with you and that old club, too—see if I don't! I'll fix you!"

Snarling and muttering he swung about and fairly ran off through the woods, leaving the two chums standing there. Ned and Harry looked at one another in surprise for a moment.

"What's got into him?" asked Harry.

"Search me! I don't know," declared Ned. "He sure got on his ear."

"It couldn't be just because we upset his apple cart," spoke Harry, with a smile. "We've done the same thing to him before and he always took it in good part."

"Something has riled him, that's sure," went on Ned. "And about the club, too. Why is he sore on that?"

"I give up. Never mind. We'd better hurry if we want to see the practice. I told Bob Dexter I'd meet him on the float. I owe him a dollar and I want to pay it."

"Good boy—paying your debts!" chuckled Ned. "All right—come on—step on the gas. But I would like to know what's got into Martin."

It was but a short distance farther, by means of the woodland path, to the snug little club house on the shore of Lake Netcong, into which flowed the Netcong River.

The two lads soon came within sight of it, and Ned exclaimed:

"There's the crew out now!"

"There's a big crowd there," said Harry. "Seems as if something had happened, Ned! I wonder if anyone could have fallen in and——"

He did not finish the sentence, but his chum knew what was meant. The two lads broke into a run, and, as they approached the club house and float, they could hear excited voices exclaiming:

"It's a rotten shame!"

"Mean work, all right!"

"Couldn't be worse! Who you s'pose did it?"

The exclamations, murmurs and denunciations increased as Ned and Harry drew nearer. They saw

a crowd of lads on the float, gathered near the racing craft which had been put into the water. Other lads were within the club house, and then came more excited talk.

"What's the row?" demanded Ned of Fred Merton.

"The club house has been wrecked!" replied Fred.

"Wrecked?" repeated Ned, with a glance at the structure, which, from without, showed nothing unusual.

"Well, our trophies have been stolen and smashed! Some gang of hoodlums was here in the night and look what they did! Just look!"

Fred led the two newcomers to the open door of the club. Within indeed was the scene of a sad wreck. Tables and chairs were overturned, and some were broken. Silk banners had been torn from the wall, and several glass cases, which had contained silver and gold cups—prizes of many athletic contests—were thrown to the floor, the cups bent and the cases broken.

"They stole a lot of the cups and medals, too," added Charlie McGill. "It's fierce!"

"Who did it?" demanded Ned, at the same moment he shot a quick look at Harry.

"We don't know!" came in a chorus from the other lads.

"It was like this when Joe Wright got here to

open the place so the crew could start practice," asserted Tom Wilson.

"Does Old Tim know anything about it?" asked Ned, for Tim was a sort of care-taker of the club, also running a little soda water, ice cream and candy stand in the place.

"Tim isn't here yet, and that's queer, too, for he 'most always is the first to get here," said Joe, who was secretary of the club. "This is a mystery all right."

At the mention of that word "mystery," many of the lads seemed stirred by a new thought to sudden action.

"Where's Bob Dexter?" exclaimed several.

"That's right—Bob's the lad to size this up!" said Harry.

"He ought to be here," commented Ned.

"Here he comes now!" called Harvey Thomas, president of the boys' organization. "I shall at once call a special meeting of the club that we may take action."

There were half-concealed smiles on the faces of some of the lads at Harvey's words. Harvey was a nice fellow, very efficient and all that, but perhaps a bit too much so. He was very methodical and his hair was always combed, and if you need any further tip than that to tell what sort of a lad he was I'm sorry for you. However, he was a real boy, and much thought of by his chums—how he

happened to be president of the club—well, that's another story which I shall tell you later.

"Yes, Bob's the lad to get at the bottom of this!" declared Joe. "Hi Bob—come on—hurry!" he called, for the newcomer was sauntering slowly along a path that led along one shore of the lake to the club house.

"What's the rush?" asked Bob Dexter, shifting from one side of his mouth to the other a blade of grass he was chewing. Bob nearly always had a toothpick, a straw or a bit of grass in his mouth. It was just a little habit of his.

"Rush? You'll say there's been a rush when you see what's happened!" declared Ned.

Bob gave one look at the interior of the fine little club house, now laid to such waste by a visit of vandals, and then gave vent to a low whistle.

"Say, this is fierce!" he murmured. "Who did it?"

"That's a mystery you've got to solve—same as you found the little girl who was lost," remarked Ned.

At that moment, while Bob, without speaking further, was letting his sharp eyes take in more details of the vandalism, Ned nudged Harry and said, in a low voice:

"There's Martin Sill again!"

CHAPTER II

THE GOLDEN EAGLE

HARRY PIERCE looked toward where his chum had pointed. He had but a momentary glimpse of the face of the lad on whom the joke had been played a little time before. Then Martin Sill seemed to fade away and become part of the underbrush from which he had peered.

"Don't say anything about him—or what happened," warned Ned, still in a low voice, to Harry. "There may be nothing in it—and there may be something."

"That's right—we'd better wait and see what Bob Dexter says," rejoined the other. "He's sizing things up as he always does."

Indeed, after his first exclamation, having noted the vandalism worked within the neat club house, Bob Dexter, the hero of this story, was following his usual practice when anything unusual occurred.

He was carefully looking over the ground, noting all points, as a well-trained detective might do at a scene of a crime. And, in a sense, a crime had been committed at the Netcong Boys' Athletic Club,

for valuable and revered trophies and relics had been stolen, and others had been sadly damaged.

Perhaps it would be too much to call Bob Dexter a detective, and yet, young as he was, he had already evinced traits that might put him in that class later in life. Ask him, however, and he would smilingly deny any detective ability.

"I just use common sense and keep my eyes and ears open," he would say. But, after all, does an efficient detective do any more than that—and then act? I think not.

Bob Dexter was an orphan, his parents having died when he was a small boy, and most of his life had been spent in Cliffside, with his uncle and aunt. Joel Dexter was a brother to Bob's father, and when the latter died, a year or so after his wife, Bob's Aunt Hannah had impulsively said to her husband:

"Bring the poor boy here! We haven't any children of our own, Joel, and he will be a son to us."

And Bob had been. After the first shock of his grief had worn away—not a very long process, happily, in children, he had fitted well into the household of his uncle and aunt. Joel Dexter was comfortably well off, owning a hardware business in Cliffside, and Bob had all the comforts of life, and some luxuries.

One of the features of Cliffside was the Boys' Athletic Club. It was started and financed by Watson Sanbarth, the wealthiest resident of the town,

and given and maintained by him in memory of his dead son, Kenneth, who, had he lived, would have been about Bob's age.

Not every lad in Cliffside was eligible to the Boys' Athletic Club, though, like most organizations of similar title, it had no hard and fast rule that a member must excel in manly sports. Indeed many members were regular "duffers" when it came to baseball, tennis, or football. But all the members loved life in the open, and this alone made them eligible. Other lads of the town vainly sought admission. And perhaps the inability of some, like Sam Watson and Jake Johnson, to get in, induced them to start a rival organization, known as the Pastime Pleasure Club. It also had a club house, on the outskirts of the town, near the shore of the lake, in rather a dismal part of the woods.

In the troubled moments that followed the discovery of the vandals' visit to their club house, the boys welcomed the advent of no one so much as that of Bob Dexter.

"Well, what do you think of it, Bob?" asked Ned Fuller, when the quiet lad had entered the place and viewed, without remarking, the work of theft and destruction.

"It's pretty bad," was the cautious admission.

"Can you tell who did it, Bob?" asked Harvey Thomas, the neat and somewhat fussy president of the club. "If you can tell us I will call a meeting

at once—we have enough members for a quorum," he added, stopping to make a careful count before he announced this. "We can pass a resolution of indignation."

"A lot of good that'll do!" murmured Joe Wright.

"It is the proper procedure," said Harvey, a bit stiffly. "We must go on record, and then we can take action. Do you know who had anything to do with this, Bob? Are there any clews? Shall I telephone for the police?"

"Clews? The place is full of them," said Bob.

"It is?" cried several, gazing about eagerly but seeing, probably, none of the things Bob, with his more practiced eyes, beheld.

"Yes, but I don't know which to follow," was the somewhat disappointing answer. "I don't know what good the police can do, but call them in if you like, Harvey."

"The Cliffside police never found out anything yet that wasn't as plain as the brass buttons on their uniforms," laughed Ned. "Look how they couldn't find Jennie Thorp until Bob took a hand."

"That's right! Bob found her all right!" chorused several.

"Real detective work that was!" declared Fred Merton.

"Oh, anybody could have found the kid after

getting the start that I did," said Bob, modestly enough.

"Oh, you did a good piece of work there, and we all know it!" asserted Charlie McGill.

In fact it was the discovery of the missing Jennie, who, it was thought first had been kidnaped, that brought Bob Dexter into prominence in Cliffside as a young amateur sleuth. I shall tell you the story of Jennie in the proper place.

"Well, let's do something if we're going to—don't stand here all day gassing!" exclaimed Tom Wilson. "If we're going to have the police in let's have 'em, and then let's get at the rowing practice. Goodness knows we need it."

Being a member of the rowing crew perhaps he spoke with authority.

"That's right! Let's do something!" exclaimed Harry. "But when did it happen?"

"And who discovered it first?" asked Ned.

"I reckon I did—I was first here this morning, to open the place so the crew could practice," answered Joe Wright.

"Just when it happened no one seems to know," spoke president Harvey Thomas. "But it was some time after the special meeting last night."

"Was there a special meeting last night?" asked Bob Dexter quickly. "I didn't know that."

"I sent you a notice by Ted Lewis," went on the president. "Didn't you give Bob his notice,

Stumpy?" asked Harvey, turning toward a short, stocky lad, whose build was the obvious reason for his nickname.

For answer Stumpy put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a dirty and crumpled note. With it was a collection of fishing tackle, consisting of a tangled line, some sinkers and a float—everything but a hook and pole, in fact. A pole, when he wanted one, Stumpy could cut in the woods. His hooks he carried in the band of his slouch hat, and he put up his hands now, after pulling out the note, to make sure the barbs were safe in place.

"Forgot!" was the one word Stumpy uttered. He was very saving of his language, was Stumpy Lewis, a characteristic that led Bob to say there must be Scotch blood in him, somewhere.

"You're a peach, Stumpy!" observed Bob. "I'd have come to the special meeting if I'd known of it. What was it for?"

"Didn't you hear?" chorused several.

"No," and Bob shook his head.

"We fired Martin Sill," said Joe Wright.

"Fired Martin Sill!" exclaimed Ned, with a quick look at Harry. "What for?"

Neither he nor his chum had been at the special meeting, as they were out of town, though they knew one had been called, though why they had not inquired.

"He was caught cheating in the checker tourna-

ment," said Harvey Thomas quietly. "It was a hard thing to put him out of the club, but this isn't the first time he has done such work, and our duty to the other members of the organization made it necessary to take the action we did. I trust you will approve of it," and he looked gravely at Bob.

"Oh, sure, I'll agree with the majority every time," said the young detective quickly. "But I didn't know Martin was that kind of a lad."

"Neither did I, or I should not have endorsed his application," remarked the president. "It is a regrettable occurrence."

Really the only thing the boys had against Harvey was his rather too precise and "hifalutin' language," as Bob called it. Otherwise he was as good a chum as you would meet in a week's travel.

"So Martin's out of the club, is he?" murmured Ned, with another look at Harry.

"His resignation has been formally demanded, and he has been notified according to our rules," asserted Harvey.

"Well, this isn't getting us anywhere in finding out who did this measily work!" said Tom Wilson. "It's going to cost us a good bit to mend those broken cases, and as for getting the trophies fixed —say, it'll about bankrupt us." He was the treasurer, and might be expected to know whereof he spoke.

"We'll have to call a special meeting, and tax every member a dollar or so, to pay for this damage," said Joe Wright.

"A dollar!" cried Charlie.

"Sure, that isn't any too much!" retorted Joe.

"No, I didn't mean that," Charlie was quick to add, "but it won't be enough—will it, Tom?"

"I'm afraid not. It's going to cost us a pretty penny to fix things up the way they were before," stated the treasurer.

"Well, then we can arrange to give a benefit—hold some sort of a meet and charge admission," suggested Joe. "Everybody in town'll come when they know it's for the benefit of the club."

"Except the Pastime lads," suggested Charlie.

"Oh, we wouldn't let them in if they wanted to come!" declared Joe.

"Well, let's pass that for the time being," went on Ned. "How about finding out who did this?"

"If Bob can find out who did it, so we can have 'em arrested, maybe we can make 'em pay for it," said Charlie. "How about it, Bob? Are you getting anywhere on this mystery?"

For the young detective, as I think he deserves to be called, had, as yet, said little; and nothing at all leading. He was moving quietly about the looted main room of the club house—the room where the valued trophies were displayed—or had been until the vandals broke in.

Silently the boys followed him, for Bob had earned a reputation that made him respected when it touched on his special line.

"If you fellows wouldn't mind not tramping all over the place, until I get a chance to look about a bit, maybe I might pick up a lead somewhere," suggested Bob, good-naturedly.

"He's right—we shouldn't paw things over," asserted Ned.

"Let's clear out and let Bob have a clean field —until he finds something," suggested Harry Pierce.

The boys were about to withdraw, some none too willingly, when Fred Merton uttered an exclamation and, pointing, cried:

"Look! It's gone!"

"What?" came the general demand.

"The golden eagle! It's been taken away!"

Many eyes looked toward a vacant place on a shelf over the chair where the president sat when meetings were held. Yesterday there had stood there a magnificent specimen of a stuffed golden eagle—the choicest trophy of the club—its mascot, in fact.

Now the golden eagle was gone!

CHAPTER III

IN DISGUISE

PERHAPS no other trophy—cup, medal or banner—meant as much, sentimentally and actually, to the members of the Boys' Athletic Club, as did the golden eagle. Really I should speak of it in capital letters, so important was it considered to the members of the organization. But as I shall have occasion to refer rather frequently to the mascot in this story, perhaps it will be as well to "keep it down," as a printer would say, that is write the name only in "lower case," and I shall leave you to puzzle out the meaning of that for yourselves.

I have said the golden eagle was a mascot, and it was all that—and more. It had a history intimately connected with the club, though not all of the members knew that history personally.

Mr. Sanbarth had started the Athletic Club some years before this story opens, and it had been in continuous existence ever since. There was a rule that once a youth passed his twenty-first birthday he ceased, automatically, to be an active member of the club. He was no longer a boy—he was a

man. And Mr. Sanbarth had determined to keep it a club for boys in every sense of the word. There was nothing to prevent, however, those members who became of age from continuing as associate or honorary members, according to the manner in which they assisted the club.

So it was some years before any of the present members had joined that the golden eagle became the mascot of the club. Long had it been revered, and those lads who took part in competitive athletic meets would no more have thought of entering contests without first saluting the golden eagle before beginning, than they would have of going into a running race without spiked shoes, or playing football without padded trousers.

It was a mascot and a revered tradition in the club, was the golden eagle—so called because of the hue of some of the big feathers. And the eagle was intimately associated with the family of the founder of the club. For Kenneth, the loved and only son of Mr. Sanbarth, had shot and killed the big bird of prey on Chestnut Mountain. Not ruthlessly had the lad raised his rifle against the golden eagle, but the big creature had attacked a little child of a mountaineer when Kenneth happened to pass a lonely cabin on one of his hunting trips. Whether the child had surprised and frightened the eagle while it was at some meal on the ground, or whether the bird wantonly attacked the little girl,

Kenneth did not stop to consider. He took quick aim and fired, meaning only to disable the feathered giant. But his bullet went too true and the bird was killed, after having scratched and bitten the child.

Kenneth's father had the wonderfully perfect specimen stuffed and mounted, and, when his son died, and when the club had been formed, the golden eagle was given a place of honor. And, as I have said, whenever any of the club members started out to fight for honors on the field, track, river or lake, they invariably came to attention on a certain spot on the floor, below the inscrutable gaze of the yellow glass eyes of the stuffed golden eagle, and gravely saluted the bird.

"It brings us luck," Bob Dexter had explained to a visitor who wonderingly witnessed the ceremony one day. "We couldn't win half our contests without the golden eagle."

And now the prized bird was gone—taken away together with many valuable cups and medals, to say nothing of silken banners, which, worth little in themselves, meant much to those who had won them.

"And how we're going to win the rowing race with Netcong to-morrow, with the eagle gone, is what I want to know," said more than one lad, gloomily enough when the loss was discovered.

"Maybe Bob can get it back for us," suggested Ned.

"Sure!" chimed in Harry. "He's going to find out who did this dirty work; aren't you, Bob?"

"Don't cross a bridge until you hear the tramp of its feet," remarked Bob, somewhat enigmatically, as sometimes was his habit. "I don't know that I can find anything about this. But I'll have a good try!"

There was an air of quiet determination about him that, somehow or other, gave his chums confidence.

"How'd they reach up there and get the eagle?" asked Charlie McGill, as they paused again to look at the vacant place. "It's too high to reach without a step ladder, and they didn't leave any ladder out here as they would have done if they used it."

As if in answer to this query, Bob pointed to one of the long oars, or sweeps, used by the racing crew. The blade, with its long, slender handle, stood in a corner of the main room, not far from the shelf on which the mounted golden eagle had looked out on the world, now dead to him.

"They knocked the bird down with that oar," said Bob.

"How d'you know?" demanded Joe.

"There are some feathers sticking to the blade," answered Bob quietly.

"Whew!" whistled several, amazed at this simple deduction from an obvious clew.

"If they did that they have knocked the stuffing out of the eagle!" exclaimed Ned, meaning it literally as he had spoken.

"They've ruined it!" gasped Harry.

"Maybe so," admitted Bob. "Anyhow, that's how they got it down off the high shelf. But now if you fellows really want me to try to figure this thing out——"

"Sure we do!" came in a chorus.

"Then vamoose!" said Bob, simply but with meaning. "If there are any clews I stand a fat chance of picking them up after this mob has tramped over everything. Skedaddle!"

"He's right. We must let him alone," insisted Harvey.

As he spoke there arose a cry of alarm from the little outbuilding where Old Tim kept his supply of "eats," and he was heard to shout:

"Sure I'm robbed entirely! Wurra! Wurra!"

"They must have looted Tim's shack, too!" exclaimed Tom. "I hope he didn't leave any money in the cash drawer."

All the lads save Bob made a rush to question the genial Irishman who sold them soda, candy and ice cream in summer, and hot frankfurters and coffee in winter.

Left to himself in the disordered main room of

the club house, Bob Dexter's manner seemed to change suddenly. No longer was he a careless, human, somewhat slouching lad, walking about with a free and easy step. His whole body stiffened, as you may have seen a pointer dog stiffen when he came upon a bird which he instantly marked. The eyes of the young detective brightened, and their glances took in every corner of the room, roving here and there—up and down the walls from which banners had been torn and whence trophies had been removed.

Then, like a cat walking on a narrow back fence, Bob began a tour of the apartment. He could hear the boys discussing with Old Tim some new feature of the outrage, but he paid little attention to this. His mind was intent on the special business to which he was giving his attention.

Suddenly something on the floor attracted his gaze. He stooped quickly and picked it up, examined it a moment and put it in his pocket. But not, however, until he had given a quick look around to make sure that none of his fellow members of the club had come back into the room to observe him.

"No use letting them know how easy it is to pick up a clew, when you know how," Bob told himself with an appreciative grin. He had no "swelled head" regarding his own abilities, and he knew, compared to the skill of real police detectives, that his

ability was small, indeed. But Bob had his own little pride of achievement and was going to hold to it.

"Well, I've got a start, anyhow," he whispered, rather than spoke aloud. "And I guess——"

But his further musing was interrupted by the rush back into the room of the crowd that had just left, including the rowing crew.

"What do you think of that, Bob?" asked Fred Merton.

"Think of what?" asked Bob, quietly.

"Why they cleaned out Old Tim's cash drawer and broke a lot of his soda water bottles."

"They drank some, too," said Bob.

For a moment no one answered him, but all looked surprised. Then Tom Wilson demanded:

"How d'you know that? You weren't out there."

"Oh, maybe a little bird told me," and Bob smiled.

"Say, that's pretty good!" laughed Charlie McGill. "You're doing some detective work already, aren't you, Bob?"

"That's right!" chimed in the others.

"No, I haven't started yet," was Bob's quiet answer. "But it's easy enough to guess that if some one breaks into a soda water shack and takes money and breaks bottles, naturally they're going to drink some of the stuff. How many were there?"

"As if we could tell!" exclaimed Joe Wright.

"Did you notice how many glasses had been used, how many straws were scattered about or how many empty bottles there were?" asked Bob.

"That's so! We might have told that way!" cried Harry Pierce.

"Go out and take a look, Bob," invited Harvey Thomas. "We want to get at the bottom of this outrage if possible."

Bob went to the little building where Old Tim held forth. The good-natured Irishman was gazing about the disordered place with a look of dismay on his face.

"Sure they made a ruin of it!" he declared, "an' lash night I was after lavin' it as clane as a whistle!"

"There must have been a dozen in here, at least!" declared Ned Fuller as he noted several empty glasses, half a score of empty bottles and a litter of straws on the floor.

"Not more than three, or, possibly four," was Bob's comment.

"How do you make that out?" several voices asked him.

"How many bottles of soda water of this size can you drink, Ned?" countered the young detective, quickly.

"Oh—er—well—now—maybe—three!" stammered the lad.

"And three goes into twelve four times," said Bob, softly.

"Oh!" There was this sigh of understanding on the part of several lads.

"Which of course may or may not mean anything," went on Bob quickly. It wouldn't do, he was beginning to think, to let his little methods of doing detective work become too well broadcast. "Well, I'll do what I can," he added. "Do you think you'd better tell the police?" he asked Harvey.

"Well, I think perhaps we ought—and yet—what do you say? How about telling Mr. Sanbarth?"

"Oh, yes, of course we'll have to tell him," agreed Bob. "But let the police alone for a while."

"That's what I say!" chimed in Ned.

"All right," assented the club president. "Do the best you can for us, Bob. Have you looked around enough? Shall we start in and clean up? The place looks so fierce——"

"Sure! Slick it up!" advised Bob. "I've got some clews to work on. No use letting our club house look like a dump any longer than we can help."

With that the boys fell to the cleaning-up work —that is all but the members of the rowing crew who, after ascertaining that their boat and rigging was undamaged, went out for a practice on the lake.

Ted Lewis had, during the talk between Bob and

the members of the club, been closely observing the young detective.

Now, as Bob started away, Stumpy, ignoring for a time his duty to help "slick up" the place, followed.

"Hey!" called Stumpy.

As I have told you he was very saving of his words.

"Well, what is it?" asked Bob, turning.

In reply Stumpy thrust one hand into his pocket —the same pocket where he had concealed the notice of meeting he had forgotten to give Bob. And then Stumpy uttered just one word. It was:

"Fish?"

But there was a question mark at the end of it, and Bob understood enough of the queer ways of his queer chum to interpret it.

"No, I don't believe I'll go fishing with you now, Stumpy," replied the young detective. "Some other time—maybe."

Stumpy's only answer was a grunt of comprehension, and he turned and went back to the club house.

And in the face of what Bob had said it was a little difficult to understand what took place a little later that afternoon. The club house had been put in as good order as was possible after the visit of the vandals, and some of the broken gold and silver cups had, on the advice of Mr. Sanbarth, been

sent to the jeweler's to be straightened. Having nothing special to do, Harry Pierce and Ned Fuller walked idly along the shore of the lake.

"Do you think we'd better tell Bob what happened with us and Martin Sill, Ned?" asked Harry.

"You mean what he said when we upset his apple cart?"

"Sure, and being fired out of the club, and coming around to look afterward—and all that?"

"Sure we'd better tell Bob. Say, do you think Martin could have done any of the damage?"

"I don't know. It was done before we upset him, anyhow."

"Yes, that's sure. Well, let's go tell Bob."

The home of Mr. Dexter was farther down the lake, and the two lads reached it in due time. But Bob wasn't at his uncle's house.

"He said he was going down to Beech Point," Bob's aunt told the seekers.

"We'll find him, thank you," responded Harry.

"Wonder what he's doing there—it's near the Pastime Pleasure Club's shack," observed Ned, as they walked along.

"Can't you guess?" asked Harry, giving his companion a quick glance.

"Oh!" was the rejoinder.

Beech Point was a little wooded strip of land extending out into Lake Netcong, and it was, at some seasons of the year, a good place to fish. It

was not surprising, therefore, that Ned and Bob should catch sight of a bare-footed lad, in ragged clothes, and a torn straw hat, seated on a log near the water, holding a motionless pole.

"Who's that?" asked Ned in a whisper.

"Search me—some strange kid," answered his chum, also in a low voice, for there was an unwritten law about making noise where fish were concerned.

"I'll ask him if he's seen Bob—maybe he knows him," suggested Ned. So he called, softly: "Say, kid, have you seen Bob Dexter—do you know him?"

In answer the strange lad, in ragged clothes, a ragged straw hat, and barefooted, turned a smiling face toward them.

"Howling tomcats!" ejaculated Ned. "It's Bob himself!"

"Disguised!" gasped Harry. "Well, wouldn't that win the plush-lined bath tub for you!"

CHAPTER IV

OLD MARIETTA

FORGETTING caution, in their surprise at discovering their chum in such a peculiar outfit, Ned and Harry were indulging in rather noisy expressions of wonder, when Bob held up a warning hand.

"Not so loud!" he cautioned.

"Why—'fraid we'll scare the fish?" asked Ned, lowering his voice. "They aren't biting here this time of day, anyhow—too sunny."

"It suits me," was Bob's cautious answer. "And, if it's all the same to you, I wish you fellows would move your boat. You're on my side of the fence."

For a moment or two neither Ned nor Harry understood what their friend was driving at. Then, as if to make them comprehend, Bob pointed toward the club house, or, rather, "shack" of the Pastime Pleasure organization. It was little more than a rough, board shanty, where, if rumor was to be believed, rough doings were sometimes held.

"Oh!" exclaimed Ned, comprehendingly. "Are you trying to get some evidence against them, Bob?"

"Don't ask questions and I won't have to tell

you things that, maybe, aren't so," chuckled Bob silently. "I'm here—and that's enough for the present. I don't want to be impolite," he went on, gravely, with an artificial air that Harvey Thomas wore almost always, "but I would much prefer that you hadn't come here."

"That's all right, Bob," said Harry. "We understand. We'll vamoose in a couple of seconds. But we came to tell you something."

"Has anything been found out—up at the club house?" asked the young detective eagerly, and, it must be said, with an air of disappointment. He had begun to take a keen interest in this mysterious case which he wanted to solve all by himself.

"No, there's nothing new," said Ned. "But a funny thing happened to Harry and me this morning when we were coming down to watch the crew practice. It was about Martin Sill," and then, by turns, he and Harry related how they had upset the other lad, and they detailed the threats he had made, ending by telling how they had seen him peering from the bushes shortly after the vandalism had been discovered.

"Um!" was all Bob remarked when they had finished.

"We thought you'd be glad to hear that," spoke Ned, a bit crestfallen.

"I am—thanks," murmured Bob.

"Do you think he—I mean does it mean anything?" faltered Harry.

"Can't tell yet—too soon," and Bob seemed adopting some of Stumpy's characteristics. "Much obliged just the same. And now I wish you'd go. I don't want that tough gang to know me," and he pointed his fishing pole toward the Pastime house.

"Know you! Why they'll know you as soon as they get a look at your face!" exclaimed Ned. "We didn't know you in that rig—it's a pretty good one, I must say," and he glanced approvingly at Bob's ragged clothes and hat. "You've even got your shoes off, and I'll say you haven't been barefoot in public in a year."

"More than that!" chuckled Bob.

"But it's your face," added Harry. "Soon as we saw that——"

He paused midway through the sentence, for Bob was doing something with his hands. The ragged lad had scooped up some clay from the ground beside him. His hand swept across his face, and when next he turned his countenance toward his chums they gave gasps of surprise. For Bob was transformed into a dingy-faced mulatto with a daub of yellow clay.

"Pompey's grandmother!" gasped Ned.

"How d'you do it?" asked Harry.

"Oh, I was just going to do that when you fellows broke in on my meditations!" silently laughed

Bob. "I had the stuff all ready. I only got here about five minutes before you did. Think they'll know me now?" And he nodded toward the shack.

"Your own aunt wouldn't know you!" exclaimed Harry.

"That's good. Then beat it!" advised Bob, and his two chums, with last, wondering looks at him, departed.

"Say, he's a slick one all the same; isn't he?" demanded Harry.

"You said it! Did you think he's getting after those Pastime lads so soon?"

"I don't know—maybe they had a hand in this and maybe they didn't—Bob isn't saying, I guess. He'll tell us when the time comes."

"That's right—same as he did when he found that little Thorp kid."

Whether Bob discovered what he set out to find, or whether or not he was satisfied with the results of his day's detective work, was not disclosed by the young sleuth when he attended a special meeting of the Boys' Athletic Club that evening. A call had been hurriedly issued by Harvey Thomas, and Mr. Sanbarth, as well as some older honorary members of the club, including Bob's uncle, were in attendance.

Bob came in just before the meeting opened. Ned and Harry turned to look at him. The lad was dressed with a little more care than usual, all

traces of his ragged clothes and muddy countenance having disappeared.

"Gentlemen, you will please come to order," said President Harvey Thomas, banging his gavel down on the marble block in front of him. He was very formal when he presided at the meetings—more formal, if possible, than during his daily converse with his chums. But for all that he was a jolly good chap—once you knew him.

"I think you all understand why we have assembled here," he went on. "It is to discuss and take action on what happened last night—the stealing and destruction of some of our most valuable trophies, and the disappearance of the golden eagle mascot. That is most serious of all, and I have asked Mr. Sanbarth to be present with us to-night."

All eyes, as was natural, turned toward the founder of the club.

"Perhaps I may speak a few words now," he said, in somewhat questioning tones.

"Mr. Sanbarth has the floor," announced the president, formally.

"There is little good in discussing what has taken place here," Mr. Sanbarth said, quietly looking around. "I think we all understand and appreciate the mean act—the act of vandals, no less! As to the golden eagle—I—I think you all understand how I feel about—that."

His voice faltered for a moment.

Indeed they all understood. Though few of them had ever known Kenneth Sanbarth, his memory was a valued one in the precincts of the club.

"Your cups, your medals and the banners can be replaced," went on Mr. Sanbarth. "Not so the golden eagle. I do not want you to think I am selfish in my regard for that—I hope I am not. But it means—it means a great deal to me." His hands gripped in a straining hold the back of the chair in front of him. "And I hope you will understand when I say I would rather see that back in its place up there, than to have replaced all the other medals and trophies that have been stolen or damaged."

He pointed to the vacant place on the shelf—the place but lately occupied by the golden eagle, and went on:

"Therefore I am going to offer a reward of five hundred dollars for the recovery of the mascot emblem. I do this on behalf of the club, and on my own behalf. That eagle is a sort of memorial of my dead son—I—I very much would like to see it recovered. Therefore, as I say, I will pay a reward of five hundred dollars!"

There were some murmurs and gasps of surprise at this statement, yet the meeting remained quiet. Mr. Sanbarth had not sat down. He had something else to say.

"I understand," he proceeded, "that one of your

members has undertaken to solve this mystery. I hope I may be pardoned if I ask, thus publicly, if you have discovered anything, Bob Dexter?"

All eyes were turned on the young detective. And it is something to his credit, I think, when I say that he arose in his seat without a trace of embarrassment and replied:

"No, Mr. Sanbarth, I haven't found out anything yet—that is anything of any account. I am working on the case, as you might say."

There arose Harrison Thornton, one of the oldest members of the club.

"Do I understand that the whole matter of discovering who did this miserable business rests in the hands of one boy—Bob Dexter?" asked Mr. Thornton, and there was a bit of sarcasm in his voice.

"Well, we thought we'd let him see what he could find out," explained Harvey. "He said we needn't tell the police and——"

"Not tell the police! That's the most foolish thing I ever heard of!" stormed Mr. Thornton. "Why, the police are the logical ones to call in on a case like this! How can Bob Dexter bring the miscreants to justice?"

"He found Jennie Thorp!" called a voice from the back of the room.

"Well, yes, I admit that," said Mr. Thornton. "But that was just a case of a child straying away.

Any Boy Scout could have followed her trail and located her."

"But they didn't—Bob did!"

Again the voice from the back of the hall.

"I am not here to discuss the detective abilities of your esteemed member," and this time Mr. Thornton smiled and bowed to Bob, who was still standing, and as cool as at first. "I am not casting any doubts on his talents, either. Let him do all he can—let him detect to his heart's content. But I say we should also notify the police."

"I have no objection," came from Bob. "In fact I was going to suggest it. I only wanted them kept out of our club house until we had a chance to look around ourselves, to see what we could find. We have had that chance" (he did not refer to himself for he was modest) "and now the police can come in."

"I think it would be wise to notify them," said Mr. Thornton. Having gained his point he was quite affable.

"Is it the sense of this meeting that we notify the police of what has happened?" asked Harvey, formally. "Are you ready for the question—will some one make a motion?"

Everything must be done in parliamentary fashion when Harvey was in the chair.

The motion was adopted unanimously, and then followed a discussion of the affair, while a com-

mittee, appointed by the chair, called the police on the telephone to notify them.

It seemed, however, that the happening at the club house was no news to the local authorities. They had heard rumors of the affair, as was natural, but, thinking it only a boyish rumpus, had not deemed it worth while to take any official action.

Now that a substantial reward was offered, and it developed that some gold and silver cups of intrinsic as well as sentimental value had been taken, Chief of Police Miles Duncan sent "Detective" Caleb Tarton up to the club house. Mr. Tarton was an ordinary police officer in plain clothes, hence the title "detective."

He arrived before the meeting was over, and went about the place with as wise an air as he could assume on short notice, looking at the place whence the various trophies had been removed.

"They got in here—they forced the lock," declared Tarton, pointing to a side door. This had been obvious from the first, for the lock was broken and there were the marks of a jimmy on the door casing. The boys had discovered that for themselves.

"I think I know who did this," said the officer, as he took his leave. "I can put my hands on them soon, I'm sure."

"Who did it?" came the demand.

"You'll know soon enough," was the enigmatical answer. "I've got my suspicions!"

There was little more that could be done that night, and the meeting adjourned. There was talk of the next day's race with the Netcong Club, and more than one lad shook his head gloomily and remarked:

"We'll never win with the golden eagle mascot gone."

But, contrary to expectations, the athletic boat forged ahead, almost at the end of the course, and the rivals were beaten by two good lengths, which caused wild and delirious joy in the ranks of the Cliffside supporters.

"Won without our mascot! What do you know about that?" yelled Harry.

"I almost wish we hadn't, though," said Ned.

"You do? Why?"

"Well, it would make the eagle so much more important to get back. Some of the fellows may think it doesn't amount to so much after all—if we could win without it."

"Bosh! We all want it back, of course. Why, Bob is so wrapped up in this case that he didn't even come to the race."

"He didn't?"

"No. Said he'd be around later, but he didn't come. I wonder what sort of a clew he has?"

"Hard to tell. Let's go see him."

This was late in the afternoon, following the triumphant victory of the Cliffside boat. As Harry and Ned were on their way through a stretch of woods, to go to Bob's uncle's house, they saw, just ahead of them, two figures through the trees. One they knew, in a moment to be that of their detective chum.

"But look who he's with!" exclaimed Ned. "Old Marietta Bobb—the witch that had the little Thorp girl!"

"She isn't a witch!" declared Harry.

"Well, everybody calls her that, anyhow. But what in the world is Bob doing with her? Does he think she can cast a spell and tell him who stole the golden eagle?"

"Bob isn't as silly as that," chuckled Harry. "But it is sort of queer. Guess we'd better not butt in."

They came to a halt, watching Bob and his strange companion disappear into the depths of the wooded grove. Then Harry exclaimed:

"Hark! Some one's coming!"

Instinctively the two lads drew off the path into a clump of bushes where they could remain unseen. And, a few seconds later there passed, on an adjoining path two lads.

"Martin Sill," whispered Harry. "And that shady crony of his, Tad Bundy is with him. They're up to no good, I'll say!"

"Listen!" cautioned Ned.

Harry looked at his chum in some surprise.

"What do you want to listen for?" he asked in a low voice.

"So we can hear what they're saying."

"I could guess that—but why?" insisted Harry.

"Because," and Ned's voice was also low. "Those two fellows are the very ones likely to know something about this. Martin has been fired from the club for cheating. And though Tad doesn't belong he's off the same piece of goods as is Martin. Keep still now, and we'll hear what our ex-member has to say."

Martin was speaking.

"I tell you he may have had a hand in it himself!"

"Who, Bob?" asked Tad.

"Sure!"

"Don't be foolish! Why would he do a thing like that and then try to find out who did it, Martin?"

"Why would he? So he'd get a big name—that's why. He could do the thing and then pretend to find the golden eagle and everybody would say he's a big detective—that's why!"

CHAPTER V

A CALL FOR HELP

WHAT Tad answered, in reply to the startling accusation made by the shiftless Martin, neither the hiding Harry nor Ned heard. For the two lads, to avoid whom the Athletic Club members had hidden in the bushes, passed on their way, their voices fading to an indistinct murmur.

"Say, what do you think about that?" asked Ned of his chum, as they again proceeded on their way, following, unconsciously, perhaps, Bob and his weird companion.

"I don't know what to think," answered Harry. "You heard what Martin said—that Bob might have done this mean trick himself."

"I heard—sure. But Martin's crazy even to think of such a thing—much less say it. As if Bob would spoil things at his own club!"

"He wouldn't spoil things, of course. He wouldn't any more take the trophies and bang up our cups than he'd tie a stone around his legs and jump in the lake. But——"

"Say, what do you mean—what are you going

to say?" and Ned fiercely broke in on his chum's talk. "Were you going to say that Bob might have taken the golden eagle?"

"He might—mightn't he?" asked Harry, smiling and much more cool than his easily excited chum. "There isn't anything to prevent him getting in the club house when no one else is there and taking things—is there?"

"No, not if you put it that way," admitted Ned. "But——"

"I'm only arguing as I think Martin must be," went on Harry.

"What do you want to do that for?" fiercely demanded his companion. "Are you going to accuse a good friend like Bob Dexter of doing a rotten mean trick like taking the golden eagle? Are you?"

"Of course not! But suppose you hear some one else say that of him—I mean in public, not in a sneaking way like Martin just did—what would you do?"

"What would I do? I'd bust him a good clip in the face—that's what I'd do!" declared Ned. "And I'll lambaste Martin one when I see him, if he makes a crack like that again!"

"Go easy now," advised Harry with a smile. "Busting people in the face isn't going to get you anywhere except into trouble. The thing we want to do, if we hear arguments like that against Bob,

is to be ready to shoot back something that will disprove 'em."

"That's right," admitted Ned. "You're right there!"

"Well, then," went on Harry, "we want to consider what we'd answer if some one—say Martin—was mean enough to pop that at us. Suppose I say, now, that Bob took that eagle himself. What would you say?"

"I'd say you were talking through your overshoes!"

"That isn't any argument. Didn't you ever hear of some one creating a mystery just to get credit for solving it? Didn't you?"

"Yes, I've read of such cases," admitted the other.

"Well, it isn't impossible—mind you I say *impossible,*" and Harry was much in earnest. "It isn't impossible that Bob could have taken away the golden eagle; is it? He may have hidden it and when the proper time comes, and when this thing blows over a little, he can bring it out and claim the reward for having found it."

"Bob Dexter wouldn't do such a thing!"

"I know he wouldn't. So do you know he wouldn't. So do all his friends know he wouldn't. But his enemies would be ready to believe that of him. Here's an instance right now—this Martin Sill."

"His name ought to be *Silly* if he makes such cracks as that," declared Ned.

"Sure it had—but he's that kind. So's his crony Tad—they're off the same piece of goods. But the thing for you to do, and for me to do and for all of Bob's friends to do, is to find some way of proving that Bob couldn't have done such a thing. Just saying he couldn't, or wouldn't, or busting people in the face isn't any argument. We got to have proof, Ned."

"I guess you're right, Harry," came the answer. "I never looked at it that way. But what can we do?"

"We'd better let Bob know what we just heard," suggested Harry. "The worst thing in the world is to keep quiet when you hear mean cracks about a friend. Tell him, even if it hurts, and then help him to disprove 'em."

"I'm with you there. But what shall we do?"

"Well, we'll wait until Bob gets back. He's gone off with Old Marietta, but he'll be back pretty soon, I guess. This is as good a place to wait as any—it's nice and cool here in the woods."

"Yes, we can sit here. But say, what do you think Bob is doing with that old woman?" asked Ned.

"Maybe she wants him to help find her bullfrog," suggested Harry with a laugh, which told that he was joking.

Marietta Bobb—"Old Marietta" she was called in that part of Cliffside near where she lived, was a queer character. She was an old woman—none knew how old—and lived by herself in a lonely cabin in the woods. She had a little garden, which she tended herself, and two of her prized possessions was a deep spring of clear, cold water, inhabited by an immense, green bullfrog. This frog was much thought of by the old woman, and woe to any boys who might stone it as it sat, pop-eyed, on the edge of the spring, ready to jump in at the first warning of danger.

Some of the boys of the town, including Bob and his chums, were friendly with Old Marietta, who allowed them to drink at her spring, on condition that they did not stone her frog. And, being decent boys, they kept to this promise. Other lads were not so decent, however, and often they would get between the frog, and his haven of the spring, and try to capture the batrachian. More than once Marietta had appealed to Bob, Ted or Harry to find the missing frog, and they had often located him in a ditch which flowed from the spring.

So Harry's suggestion had some little truth in it, though Ned remarked:

"I don't think that."

"No, I just said that for fun," admitted Harry. "Well, we won't ask him anything about it. If he wants us to know he'll tell us."

"Sure," assented the other.

They sat in the cool, shady woods, waiting the return of Bob who, if he took the shortest way back to his uncle's house from the hovel of Old Marietta, would pass this way.

During their wait Harry and Ned discussed the queer, old woman whom they had seen their chum walking with a short time before.

"I don't believe she really tried to kidnap Jennie Thorp; do you, Harry?" asked Ned, idly tossing stones against a distant tree.

"Course not. It just happened that Marietta found Jennie when she wandered away. And Bob had sense enough to follow the right trail and locate her."

The boys were talking of the first bit of detective work that had fallen to Bob's lot, giving him a reputation that started him on what, in after years, was to prove his life's work.

Jennie Thorp, a pretty little girl of the town, had disappeared one day. There had been some kidnaping cases of children in the big cities, and, naturally, rumors at once started that this crime was the cause of the missing child.

The police turned out in force, there was a general alarm, and the Boy Scouts were organized. Bob, who was working in his uncle's garden, dropped his hoe and started off alone, after nearly every

one else had gathered in the woods where, it was reported, the little girl had last been seen.

But Bob went in a different direction—proceeding straight, as a matter of fact, to the hovel of Marietta Bobb, and there he found Jennie safely asleep, worn out with her wanderings of nearly a day.

"Why did you think of looking there?" was the question most often asked of Bob, when he had restored the child to her tearful mother.

"Oh, I just happened to think she might be there—that's all."

Only so much would Bob tell to his acquaintances. To his aunt and uncle he was more communicative.

"I once told Jennie about Marietta's big frog," he said, "and she was always teasing me to take her to the spring. I never did, but I told her where it was. And when Jennie wasn't to be found, I thought maybe she might have gone off by herself to look at the frog."

And, as a matter of fact, that's just what the child did.

"No, Marietta didn't have any idea of kidnaping," was Ned's opinion, as he and his chum discussed the case. "But it looks as if Bob might be in her clutches now. It's getting late—he ought to be back—'most supper time."

"Maybe he went the other way," suggested Harry.

"Maybe. But, what say we take a stroll up there. Maybe we'll meet him coming back."

"Come on—I'm tired staying here!"

The two chums started through the forest. Unable to even guess at a reason why Bob should accompany Marietta Bobb through the woods—especially in view of the reputation the old woman possessed of owning a violent and ungovernable temper at times—the lads had given up speculation on the matter.

"Say, I know what let's do," suddenly proposed Ned.

"What?" asked Harry, as he picked up a stone and tossed it at a slender white birch sapling standing off by itself. He missed his shot, though he had confidently expected to hit the mark.

"Say, if I couldn't fire any straighter than that I wouldn't try for pitcher on the team," laughed Ned.

"Who's going to try for pitcher?" demanded his chum.

"I heard you were."

"Well, you're hearing a lot of things that aren't so—that's all I've got to say."

"On the level—aren't you going to pitch?"

"Nothing doing—not as long as Wint Haight can twirl as he has been doing lately."

"That's right—he has been pitching pretty good ball," and Ned looked about for a stone. "But I

heard they were going to try you out as a second string man—not that you couldn't do better after a while, but——"

"Cut it out," advised Harry with a laugh. "But if you think you're so clever with a rock, heave it at the tree and let's see you hit it."

"Just what I'm going to do, my old dear," laughed the other. He drew back his fist and let fly the rock, with so true an aim that it struck the sapling full and fair. "There—what's the matter with that?" demanded Ned.

"Nothing—nothing a-tall," answered Harry with exaggerated politeness and a queer accent. "But I can do as well."

He looked about for a stone that suited him—a rock nearly round to insure of its going straight—and a moment later he had let it fly.

As true as had been the aim of Ned, so true was the throw of his chum, and the rock struck the sapling with a resounding thud breaking the bark. Hardly fair treatment for a tree, if you ask me, but then I suppose I have done the same and so have you.

But Harry's stone seemed a bit freakish, or else it had struck the tree in a peculiar way for an instant after the impact it bounded off on a tangent—caromed like a billiard ball and went whizzing away among the trees.

"That was a queer shot," exclaimed Ned.

"I'll say it was," agreed Harry.

Hardly had the boys spoken when, like an echo following the course of the stone through the leafy trees, there came a shout—a man's voice crying out in seeming anger.

"Hey there!" came the hail. "Who's throwing? What you doing?"

The lads looked at each other in surprise.

"You hit somebody," declared Ned.

"Seems so," admitted Harry. "But who?"

"Search me," came frankly from the other. "But he let out a fierce yell, whoever it was. We'd better cut and run, I guess."

"Not me!" declared Harry, firmly if not gramatically. "I'll stay and take my medicine."

"Then I'll stay, too," said Ned.

"You don't need to—you didn't fire the rock."

"Say, what do you think I am? Think I'd cut and leave you?"

"No," admitted Harry frankly, and with a smile, "I didn't. But I'd like to know who it was."

"We'll find out pretty soon, I reckon," came grimly from his chum. "Some one's coming."

Through the aisles of the woods, formed by columns of trees, could be heard the approach of some one. There was the breaking of dried branches under foot, the snapping of twigs and the rustle of old and dead leaves. Whoever was coming seemed to be in a hurry.

The boys were in the position of lads who, when playing ball, have by accident broken a window. Though only one lad was actually responsible for the crash, the others must share with him the punishment.

So, though Harry had thrown the stone that had hit some one concealed among the trees, or, at least, had nearly hit them, Ned must, in honor, also stay and take what was coming.

To the sound made by the hurried approach of some one through the forest was now added an irate voice—or to the boys the voice seemed irate for it was muttering:

"Things have come to a pretty pass when a person can't take a walk in the woods without stones being showered down on 'em. I'd like to know who it was that hit me, anyhow."

"You made a bull's eye all right, Harry," whispered Ned.

"Seems so," admitted the other. "He's as mad, too, as a bull with a red rag in front of him. Wonder who it is?"

The boys were not long left in doubt. The rustling and cracking sounds came nearer and a moment or two later there burst through the bushes a queer little man, with a bald head—a pate that was as devoid of hair as an egg, and the skin, tightly stretched over the skull, glistened in the sun.

Below the bushy eyebrows—and they were as bushy as a bit of gray moss—sparkled a pair of light blue eyes—fairly sparkling they were—not, be it said, with friendliness, but with anger it seemed.

The odd, bald-pated little man came to a halt as he observed the boys—standing stock still staring at him. On their part they had not moved since the stone-throwing.

"Oh—hello!" finally ejaculated Ned, for want of something better to say. Later he explained that if he had asked "How do you do?" or "How are you?" it might have sounded too personal.

"Just as if we were inquiring how he did after being socked with a stone," remarked Ned.

"Sure. That's it," Harry had added.

So Ned just said: "Hello!"

The little bald-headed man seemed to accept this salutation in the spirit in which it was offered.

"Oh—hello—you two," he responded and he seemed a bit surprised at the size of the lads. It was as though he expected to see little boys and had met with youths. "Some one hit me with a stone," went on the bald-pated man. "Some of those pesky little boys that I drove away from the show last night. They persist in standing in the front row, and that's the best place. Can't expect folks to pay for seeing the show when they can't have the best places. That's who I thought it was—

pesky little boys. Did you see them? Did they cut off this way?"

"I chucked the stone," explained Harry. "We were firing at that tree," he pointed. "I hit it but the stone bounced off. I'm sorry if it hit you."

"Well, it didn't exactly hit *me,*" said the little man. "It struck Mr. Punch though, and——"

"Say, what's the matter with your hand?" suddenly asked Ned, for he noticed that the bald-pated man held his right hand behind him.

"Oh—that—I was having a sort of rehearsal. This is Mrs. Judy," and he brought out one of the small puppet figures that go to make up the little show, so dear to childish hearts.

"Oh, so that's who you meant by Mr. Punch; is it?" asked Harry. He had been about to inquire as to who the man's companion might be, but now it was clear to him and his chum.

"That's Mr. Punch," admitted the blue-eyed little man, smiling. "I was putting him and Mrs. Punch through their paces when the rock came sailing through the trees. It took Mr. Punch fair on the head."

"I hope it didn't do any damage," spoke Harry. "If it did——"

"Bless your heart—not a bit!" promptly declared the showman. "It wasn't half as hard as the knocks I'll give him to-night when I put on my performance. But when the stone came I was afraid it might

mean a lot of trouble with the pesky little boys. I came out in the woods to get rid of 'em, and I thought they'd followed me. I'm glad it wasn't them. Well, I guess I'll be getting back," he went on, as he worked the fingers that were enclosed in the cloth body of Mrs. Judy, surmounted as it was with her queer face. She seemed to nod her head in a friendly way at the boys, and, noticing their smiles, the showman worked Mrs. Judy's arms.

"Are you with a traveling Punch and Judy show?" asked Ned.

"That's what I am," came the answer. "I'm the whole show, in fact. Not doing so very well this season, though, if you ask me. People seem to cling to their pennies as if they had glue on. Like to come over and take a look at my outfit, lads?"

This suited the boys "right down to the ground," as they said later and forgetting, for a time, their plan to follow and see what Bob was going to do at the cabin of Old Marietta, they let the showman lead the way through the woods.

He was camped a little way from where Ned and Harry had halted to practice shooting rocks at a tree, and a snug little camp it was, as the boys soon found.

Mr. Purdy, for such he gave as his name, had a small cart which he pushed or pulled, according to the character of the road. In it he carried his simple show outfit, consisting of a sort of folding booth, of

poles and cloth, together with the figures that took part in the centuries-old drama of Punch and Judy.

In addition to the show outfit Mr. Purdy had a small tent in which he slept. This tent could be stretched over the cart, affording a secure shelter, while the cart itself made the traveling showman's bed.

"And do you cook your own meals?" asked Harry.

"Of course I do," was the answer. "Got one of those stoves that burn chunks of alcohol—no trouble at all. Like to have you stay and eat with me."

The boys had half a notion, at first, of doing just this, but they declined, for they did not imagine Mr. Purdy's larder contained a great deal, and they did not want to impose on him. However he seemed anxious enough to have them.

"But if you won't—you won't, I suppose, and that's all there is to it," he said. "However, I must get on with my practice. I go over this every day before giving my show," he said, as he set up his booth and got out the different figures. "Apt to grow rusty if I don't. Now then—Mr. Punch——"

He began his show, with the two boys his only audience, and they remained there much interested, childish as the performance was. They seemed to have forgotten their errand.

As for Mr. Purdy, he improvised some lines in the play—lines that had a direct bearing on what

had just taken place. Speaking for Mr. Punch the showman said:

"Oh, oh, such a crack as I just got. Such a crack! O yoi—yoi!"

"Who gave it to you?" asked Mrs. Judy.

"Those boys standing over there," and Punch nodded at Ned and Harry, to their no small confusion. They laughed, and Mr. Purdy, concealed in the booth, joined them in the merriment.

He did not go through the whole performance, doing only enough, as he said, "to keep his hands in," for he used both right and left in manipulating the figures.

"Come and see the show to-night, boys," he invited Ned and Harry as they walked off. "It'll be in the main square."

"Thanks—we'll come," answered Harry.

"Queer duck," observed Ned, when they were out of hearing.

"Yes, but decent. Most men would have made a row after what I did—lambasting him with a rock. But say, Ned, what was it you were going to do—just before this happened. You said something——"

"Oh, I was going to say we could slip up behind Old Marietta's cabin and see what Bob was up to if you wanted."

"Nothing like that," decided Harry. "I want to keep out in the open."

"Maybe it is better," agreed Ned. "Say, you

don't s'pose this old chap had anything to do with what happened—do you?"

"You mean at the club house?"

"Yep."

"Nope."

It was question and answer fair enough. Ned understood, for he added:

"I guess not either. But first I thought he might have—he was so queer-looking. He's clever with his hands though—isn't he?"

"You said it! He makes those little figures step around like they were alive. Must take a lot of practice."

"You got off an earfull that time. Gosh! I never thought I'd stand and look at a Punch and Judy show, though."

"Me, either. But it's different when you lambaste Mr. Punch with a rock."

"I guess so. Well, what'll we do?"

"Let's go on as we were. I'd like to know what it is Bob has on with Old Marietta, but I don't just fancy sneaking around the back to find out."

"No, I reckon it wouldn't be just the thing," admitted his chum. "But it looks sorter funny."

"It sure does."

The lads walked on in silence for a while, and then Harry stooped and picked up a stone. He was about to throw it, when he dropped it near him with a smile and said:

"Guess I'd better not. Might hit some one else."

They were proceeding through a dense part of the woods, taking a short cut that led to the road that led past the lonely cabin of Old Marietta, when Harry suddenly stopped and murmured:

"Hark!"

"What is it?" asked his companion.

"I thought I heard some one calling! Listen!"

They stood still, hardly breathing. About them were only the small noises of the summer woods—the chirp of birds and the murmurs of insects—the rustle of a crawling, harmless snake.

Then, through the quiet echoed a voice:

"Hello! Hello!" it called! "Help! Help me!"

Ned and Harry looked at each other apprehensively as they stood in the darkening shadows of the trees.

CHAPTER VI

FLICKERING FLAMES

"DID you hear that?" asked Harry of his chum.

"Sure I did! Couldn't very well help it. Who d'you s'pose it is?"

"Give it up! But we've got to do something."

"Oh, sure! Come on!" exclaimed Ned. "Hello, you! whoever you are—give us a call so we can locate you! What's the matter? Where are you?"

"I'm caught in a trap!" came back the answer.

The two boys, who had started to run toward the sound of the voice, paused a moment.

"Didn't that sound like Bob Dexter?" demanded Harry of his chum.

"It sure did. But s'posing it isn't?"

"S'posing it isn't—what do you mean?"

"I mean somebody trying to play a joke on us. This is near the Pastime shack you know."

"That's right. Say, maybe we'd better——"

Their talk was interrupted by another call from the unseen one.

"Say, if you fellows are going to help me, come along! I can't stay here all night. I'm in a trap, I

tell you—my foot's caught and I can't get loose."

"Is that you, Bob Dexter?" demanded Ned.

"Sure it is! Are you Harry and Ned—sounds like your voices?"

"Sure we are! We'll be with you in a minute!" Harry fairly shouted this, for now he recognized the tones of the young detective, though he could not imagine what could have happened to get him caught in a trap.

Together Harry and Ned dashed through the woods, along the path, now almost hidden in the fast gathering darkness. Occasionally Bob called to them to guide them, and at last they came upon him.

At first they feared something dreadful had happened, for Bob lay on his back, one leg twisted in a queer way, and extending through the low crotch of a tree.

"Whew!" whistled Ned. "You're in a bad way, Bob!"

"Are you much hurt? How did it happen?" asked Harry.

"No, I'm not really hurt at all. I just happened to step in a trap, and it closed on my foot. I stumbled and fell backward through the crotch of this tree, and I can't get up again, because I can't get my one leg, that's caught in the trap, down on the ground. If you'll take the trap off I'll be all right—except for a few bruises and about seventeen million mosquito bites!" and poor Bob slapped his

face on which, in the light of a flash torch that he pulled from his pocket, Ned could see many red blotches.

"But who put the trap here?" persisted Harry.

"That's more than I know—though I can guess," Bob answered. "Never mind that part now. Just get the trap off so I can get up and have a fair chance fighting these biting bugs!"

The flashlight came in useful, enabling the rescuers to see so they could force open the trap that had closed on Bob's right leg. The trap was a large one, but it had smooth jaws, and not spiked ones, such as are used for catching bears. Also the spring was weak, for it was an old affair, or, in spite of the heavy boots he wore, the young detective might have been seriously injured.

As it was, the trap had only pinched him badly, but it had been strong enough to hold him in such a position that he could not help himself up.

"If I could have gotten to my feet I could have sprung the trap myself," Bob explained when he was free and could limp about. "It was because I fell backward in this tree crotch that I couldn't do anything."

"Sure you're all right now?" asked Ned as the two watched their chum moving about.

"Sure! Come on, let's go. My aunt will be getting anxious, I guess."

"Shouldn't wonder," commented Harry. "We

saw you going off through the woods with Old Marietta and we sort of came up this way."

"And it's a good thing you did—much obliged!" exclaimed Bob heartily.

But afterward his chums remarked to each other that it was queer he never referred to the old woman who owned the big bull frog.

"The trap is chained to the tree," said Harry, taking a closer look at it in the light from Ned's pocket light which was still gleaming.

"Yes, that's why I couldn't get enough freedom to reach it and open it," explained Bob.

"A queer thing anybody would set a trap like this and leave it in the woods, open," commented Ned. "Why anybody might step in it and get hurt."

"They'd have to go down a certain path to step in it," said Bob. "That's what I did. Perhaps I should have kept away."

"What path was it?" asked Ned, quickly.

"Well, it is one of several that lead to the little shack, back of the big one, of the Pastime Club," answered Bob.

"You mean the shack where they gamble?" asked Harry.

"I've heard that gambling goes on there," admitted Bob, "but I can't prove it—not that I intend to. But I was on that path—it starts right here—when I stepped into the trap. Never mind—no great harm done. And say, you fellows will do me a

favor if you don't say anything about this. Will you keep quiet?"

"Sure!" promised Ned, readily.

"Has it anything to do with the club house mystery and the missing golden eagle?" asked Harry.

"Can't tell—yet," was Bob's answer, and his chums had to be satisfied with that.

"Well, let's get back," suggested Ned, when it was ascertained that Bob could limp along, after a fashion.

"And shut off that light of yours," advised the young detective. "It's attracting the mosquitoes in swarms, and they were bad enough before. They had a regular feast off me!"

Bob's uncle and aunt were just beginning to wonder where he could be staying, when he and his chums returned. Not that it was unusual for the lads to be away hours at a time in the pleasant summer weather.

"Mind now! Don't say anything about the trap!" warned Bob in a low voice to his chums, as they parted at his gate, and they renewed their promise.

Bob removed his boots—for he had been doing some work in a part of the garden near a swampy ditch just before he went away with Old Marietta. His leg was black and blue where the jaws of the trap had pinched him, but he suffered no permanent injury from it.

"Do you know what I think?" asked Harry of Ned, as they went on toward their homes.

"No. What?"

"I think Bob, after he helped Old Marietta find her frog—if that's what he went for—I think he was sneaking up on the Pastime Club shack, when he stepped into the trap."

"Yes, I guess that's so. But why would those fellows put traps on the paths that lead to their place?"

"To keep the police away, of course. I tell you there's gambling going on in that little shack—not the regular club house, but the little shack."

"Maybe. And maybe that's where they have the things they stole from our club house."

"Maybe—if they stole them."

"Don't you think they did?" asked Ned.

"Well, nobody's made any charges against them yet—I mean any police charges. If Bob thinks they're guilty he isn't saying so."

"That's right—Bob doesn't say much. Well, I hope he finds the golden eagle, anyhow."

Every member of the club hoped this, and though Mr. Sanbarth did not talk much about it everyone knew that he was very anxious that the memento of his dead son be restored. He had posted in several places notice of the reward he had offered.

Meanwhile the police were actively and publicly busy trying to solve the mystery, but with all their

work, and even with the help of a private detective from an agency in a big city, brought nothing new to light.

It was an open secret that many members of the Pastime Club had been given what the boys mysteriously referred to as "the third degree" at the local police headquarters. But none of the stolen cups, medals or banners were recovered, and there was not so much as a feather of the golden eagle brought to light.

"Pretty hard case you've set for yourself; isn't it, Bob?" asked his uncle one night, when he saw the lad poring over some penciled notes at his desk.

"It isn't easy," was the frank admission. "But I haven't really started yet."

"Well, I wish you luck," said his uncle heartily.

"And I wish you'd drop the whole business!" exclaimed his aunt in a worried voice. "I'm afraid you'll get hurt, Bob!"

"Oh, there's no danger," he said, easily.

It was about a week after this, and again Bob was spending the evening quietly at home, making notes in one of several books he kept for this purpose. What the books contained was a jealously guarded secret with him.

Suddenly Uncle Joel dropped the paper he had been reading, and, listening intently a moment, exclaimed:

"There's a fire! Hear the whistle!"

"I thought it was about time!" exclaimed Bob, and it was almost as though he spoke involuntarily.

"What's that?" cried his aunt. "You thought it was time for a fire?"

"I mean there hasn't been one in quite a while," Bob hastened to say. He tossed his books into his desk, locked it and rushed for the front door, where his uncle had preceded him.

To the south there was the light of flickering flames on the night sky, and the distant throb of the motor-driven fire engine could be heard answering the alarm given by the whistle at the water works pumping station.

"Nothing very big in that direction!" commented Mr. Dexter.

"The Pastime Club is down there," remarked Bob. "Guess I'll go down and see what it is!"

"Be careful!" begged his aunt, as he dashed down the steps.

"I will!" he called back over his shoulder.

And, as Bob reached the street he saw Ned and Harry running along.

"The Pastime Club's on fire!" they cried.

CHAPTER VII

THE MAN WITH THE GUN

BOB DEXTER, looking like anything but a detective, and even a young amateur one at that, joined his chums in the street, and all three ran on toward where they could see, flickering on the dark sky, lurid flames. One reason why Bob didn't look like the regulation detective was because his ruffled hair stuck out at all angles from his head. He wore no hat, and, just previous to the alarm, he had been sitting at his desk, running his fingers through his never-too-well-combed locks—a habit he had when thinking deeply.

And now his hair stuck out like the quills of a fretful porcupine, which, after all isn't half as fretful as are those with whom it comes in contact—that is if contact is made.

"Yes, the Pastime Club's burning!" repeated Ned.

"How do you know?" asked Bob, coolly enough.

"They telephoned in the alarm from there," answered Harry. "I heard some fellows in the street talking about it."

"Maybe it's a false alarm," suggested Bob, and his two chums, trotting along at his side, looked at him in surprise, and, it must be admitted, rather suspiciously.

"False alarm?" echoed Ned.

"Can't you see the flames?" inquired Harry.

"Yes, it sure does look like a fire," and, to the further surprise of his chums, Bob gave a chuckling laugh.

"What's the joke?" demanded Ned.

"Well, it would be a joke on us—and on everybody that's running—if it turned out to be no fire at all—wouldn't it?" asked Bob.

"Say, what's the matter with you, anyhow?" cried Harry. "Have you been thinking so much over the missing golden eagle that you don't know a fire when you see one?"

"Looks so," commented Ned.

"No, it isn't that," and again Bob laughed a little. "I have been stewing over that club house mystery, that's true, but I'm not laughing at that—it's too serious. But you'll have to admit that it would be a good joke on all of us if there wasn't a fire after all; now wouldn't it?"

"Yes, I reckon it would," grudgingly admitted Ned.

"And on those fellows in the Pastime Club," persisted Bob.

"Say, don't you s'pose they know when their place is on fire?" cried Harry.

"Oh, yes—I reckon," admitted Bob, and he did not laugh again.

But even as they trotted along beside him, Harry and Ned could not keep out of their minds certain strange thoughts that had to do with their peculiar chum. However they knew better than to question him, for they could guess what his answer would be.

As the trio neared the scene of the fire they found others also on the way to the place of excitement —boys, men, and even some women and girls. For, as Bob had remarked, there had not been an alarm of fire in Cliffside for nearly a week, and a fire—or even a false alarm—always produces excitement.

Cliffside had a new motorized department, and several pieces of this apparatus had thundered their way to the location of the Pastime Pleasure Club, passing the three lads of our acquaintance about a block from them.

But when Ned, Bob and Harry reached the not very picturesque location of the two shacks, dignified by the name of the club, they did not see the engines playing any streams on the buildings.

There was a large crowd gathered, and it was increasing all the while. Lights were gleaming in both shacks, the larger and better built one, as well as in the smaller, where, it was rumored, gambling

games went on. Many men and boys, clearly not members of the club, were crowding into the building which was not large. There was a great deal of smoke about, but no sign of flame, and when one of the firemen came out, carrying a portable chemical extinguisher, Harry, who knew him, called:

"Much damage, Bill?"

"Not any," was the rather surly answer. Nothing makes a fireman more angry than to have responded to a false alarm. Not that they want to see property destroyed by fire, but when they make a run, they like to do something.

"No damage at all?" asked Ned, wonderingly.

"No, it was a false alarm."

"But we saw flames," insisted Harry.

"It was a pile of brush back of the little shack on fire. And the funny part of it is that even the brush isn't burned."

"What you giving us?" challenged Ned. "How could there be flames and smoke in a brush pile and it not be burned?"

"Don't ask me," the fireman answered. "All I know is that it wasn't. It's like one of those moving picture fires, I guess—just a smoke bomb."

"Say, do you notice that funny smell?" asked Ned, as the fireman passed on, and the apparatus prepared to return to quarters.

"Like fireworks on Fourth of July you mean?" inquired Harry.

"Sure! Don't you smell it, Bob?"

"Um! Sort of," he admitted. And then he walked boldly into the main building of the Pastime Pleasure Club. Bob and Harry followed for everyone seemed to feel free to go in. However the members appeared to have had enough of excitement. For several of them, including Sam Watson and Jake Johnson were boisterously ordering the rooms cleared.

"Get out—everybody except club members!" cried Sam. "Get out!"

"And this means you—you fellows from the Athletic!" added Jake in surly tones. "What are you nosing in here for?" His face was scowling.

"We thought maybe we could help save some of your trophies," said Bob easily. "We lost ours, you know—not in a fire, but——"

"What do we care about that?" demanded Jake roughly. "Get out! That's what we're telling you now!" He pointed to the door. "There isn't any fire—it was a fake, whatever it was—and we don't need any of your help! Get out!"

There was nothing for our friends to do but leave, and they did this as gracefully as possible. Not before, however, Ned had noticed Bob's eyes rapidly scanning every nook and corner of the place. It was as though Bob hoped to see something.

Whether he did or not, and whether or not he was disappointed, he did not disclose—at least just then.

"Well, you were right, Bob, it was a false alarm," said Ned, when they were on their way back to the center of the town.

"Did you know it?" asked Harry.

"How could he know it?" asked Ned, and this saved Bob the possible embarrassment of answering.

"Queer though, if there were flames in a brush pile, and the pile wasn't burned," said Harry. "Guess I'll come around in the morning and take a look."

"Better not," advised Bob.

"Why?"

"Well, those Pastime fellows aren't any too friendly. No good of having a run-in with them."

"No, I guess that's right," assented Ned. "We'll keep away."

"Come on in Holzner's—I'll stand treat to sodas," invited Bob, when they were passing the town's chief "refreshment emporium." There was a goodly crowd inside, many having stopped on their way back from the "fire." But our friends managed to find places and were soon "getting outside some frozen joy," as Ned expressed it.

The trio was about to leave when Ned observed Stumpy pushing his way through the throng. He approached the table which Bob, Ned and Harry were leaving. Holding out in rather grimy paw

a knife, Stumpy extended it toward Bob and uttered but one word:

"Yours?"

"Um—yes," Bob answered. "Thanks, Stumpy. I lost it in the woods the other day. I suppose you found it?"

Such was so obviously the case, that Stumpy did not take the trouble to answer. And as Bob slipped the knife into his pocket, having invited Stumpy to have a soda, Ned observed that the handle of the knife was burned, as though it had been near a fire.

"Did you see it?" he asked Harry, after they had left Bob and Stumpy.

"No, I can't say I did. But Bob often goes off in the woods and cooks a meal over a camp fire. Maybe he dropped his knife near the blaze."

"Maybe," assented Ned.

Save for the missing gold and silver cups, and the vacant place of the golden eagle, the club house of the Boys' Athletic organization soon resumed its normal appearance following the acts of the undiscovered vandals. The torn banners were mended, the cups that had been broken or bent were fairly well restored and put in their places and the club house had been renovated—all at the expense of Mr. Sanbarth.

But the missing trophies had not been traced, nor was the golden eagle recovered, in spite of the

efforts of Bob, the police and the hired detective, and notwithstanding the stimulus of the five hundred dollars reward.

"But I'll get the eagle yet!" Bob fiercely told himself. "I'm not going to be stumped!"

He was out in the woods when he made this remark—a remark delivered solely to himself, for Bob had a habit of talking thus when thinking.

"Yes, there's a big chance for me if I can come through with this," he went on, half talking to himself in a whisper. "It will be a big feather in my cap if I get back this Golden Eagle."

The young detective could not repress a smile at the simile he had used—that of a "feather."

"But it's quite proper to speak of a feather in your cap when you're working on a bird mystery," he added with a chuckle. "The only thing is, however, that I haven't much of a starting point. But all the more credit to me if I come through with it."

It was still and quiet in the woods—just the place for a lad to think out a puzzle, Bob told himself.

"Now let me see if I can piece this together just the way it might have happened," he whispered, and he knit his brow in thought.

Almost unconsciously he found himself wending his way toward that part of the forest grove where the Pastime Pleasure Club had put up its shacks. And before he came within sight of the place, Bob

was aware that some one was ahead of him on the woodland path.

"I hope that isn't Jake or Sam," he murmured. "They're likely to kick up a row if they see me. Perhaps I'd better duck out."

It was too late, however, for the person in front of Bob turned suddenly, on hearing a twig snap under the lad's incautious tread, and Bob found himself looking at a strange man and a gun. Not that he was exactly looking down the muzzle of the weapon, for the man held it pointed carefully toward the earth.

"Oh!" exclaimed Bob, almost involuntarily. "Are you hunting? It's out of season, you know."

"Yes, thank you, I know," and the man smiled rather pleasantly. "But what I'm hunting isn't out of season."

"What are you after?" asked Bob, curious to know what game could be in season at midsummer.

"Golden eagles!" was the unexpected answer. "I'm after a golden eagle. Perhaps you can tell me where I can get one."

The man with the gun looked strangely at Bob Dexter.

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE BIKE TRAIL

NOT infrequently had it fallen to the lot of Bob Dexter to be chaffed, or "chivied" as an Englishman might say, by older persons—particularly by men who thought themselves superior to the lad. It was part of life, Bob thought, and accepted it as such, even as you, also, have accepted it. But nothing makes a youth any more angry than to be made fun of by some man who thinks himself superior.

It was this that caused a feeling of anger to well up in the heart of the lad when, in answer to his inquiry, the man with the gun had said he was after a golden eagle.

"Oh, so you're that kind of a hunter; are you?" asked Bob, and there was a covered sneer in his voice. "I thought perhaps you might be something else."

"What else?" asked the man, and he now smiled broadly.

"A detective," replied Bob boldly.

"A detective? And why?" The man's tone was easy.

"Because it takes a detective to find a golden eagle around here," said the lad.

You can, I am sure, guess at the thoughts in Bob's mind. He took the man to be from the detective agency in the city—not the one Mr. Sanbarth had first engaged, for that individual had gone back some time ago—a self-confessed failure. But Bob imagined another "operator" as they call themselves had taken his place. Hence his remark. He wanted to let the man know he had penetrated his disguise.

"Oh, and so it takes a detective to find golden eagles around here; does it?" the man asked. "Perhaps you are one—I mean a detective, for I can see that you aren't a golden eagle."

This was adding insult to insult, Bob thought, and with a sudden flare-up he declared:

"Yes, I am a detective!"

"Good!" ejaculated the man. "You're just the one I'm looking for!"

"You mean—you mean you want to help me solve the club house mystery?" faltered the lad.

"Club house mystery? No, I haven't anything to do with that. I tell you I am looking for a golden eagle. I am a scientist, and I have heard that there is an aery of those rare birds in this locality. I thought perhaps you could tell me where

I might locate them. Eagles aren't a game bird, I take it, and they can be hunted any time of the year. That's Chestnut Mountain up there; isn't it?" and he pointed to a rather lofty peak that dominated the plain on which Cliffside was located.

"That's Chestnut Mountain—yes," Bob answered.

"And wasn't a golden eagle shot there, some time ago?"

"Yes," Bob replied. The story was common property, how Kenneth Sanbarth had shot the fierce bird to save the little child.

"Golden eagles seldom desert a place once they have made their nest there, not even when one of their number is killed," went on the man, who seemed to know about what he was talking. "If you could show me the way up the mountain I'd be willing to pay you well."

Bob took a sudden resolve, and, at the same time, some queer ideas flitted through his head—something entirely new in connection with the club house mystery.

"I can show you the place where the golden eagle was shot, some years ago," said Bob, slowly, "but I haven't heard of any being seen on the mountain since. But if you want to take the chance, I'm willing."

"I'll take the chance," the man said. "I really am what I said I was—a scientist after a golden

eagle specimen. It may have sounded funny to you at first, but no more queer than to hear you say you were a detective."

"I am," said Bob, simply.

"Ha! Ha!" laughed the man, slapping his leg with a resounding whack. "That's right—keep up the joke. But if we're going up the mountain, come on! I don't live around here. I rode my bicycle over from Atwell this morning. I live there. I left the wheel in Clayton's garage, as I knew I couldn't manage with it up the mountain trail. I'll ride back this evening—after I get the golden eagle."

"You may be a long time getting one," cautioned Bob. "As I told you, I don't believe one has been seen on Chestnut Mountain since Kenneth shot that one quite a few years ago."

"Perhaps you don't know how to trail golden eagles," ventured the man with the gun. "In fact I don't believe you do. Few are so gifted. It takes time and patience. But I have both. All I ask of you is to show me where the eagle was killed some time ago. I'll do the rest."

"All right," agreed the lad.

Bob Dexter made up his mind not again to refer to the club house mystery. The man did not seem to know anything about it, and there was no use complicating matters. For all that, however, Bob

had a certain idea in his head that he was going to carry out.

Just now he had plenty of time on his hands. His aunt had gone away on a visit for several days, and his uncle had said he might be at a building and loan meeting quite late that evening. So Bob could remain out until around midnight without causing undue anxiety, Jane, the one maid kept by his aunt, always went to bed early and was never seen again until morning.

With many thoughts seething through his brain, Bob led the strange hunter up the easiest trail of Chestnut Mountain. Beyond exchanging names—the hunter giving his as Herman Korth—Bob and his companion said little. The man seemed to be what he claimed—a scientist—for many times on the upward trail he stopped to look at some rock formation, or to pick what Bob thought were weeds, but which Mr. Korth dignified by long Latin names.

"Here's about the place where Kenneth Sanbarth shot the golden eagle," said Bob, after a two hours' climb, as he came to a halt on a little plateau.

"I thought there was a house around here," remarked the man. "You spoke of saving a little child from the attack of the bird—I mean that is the story; isn't it?"

"Yes, there was a house here, years ago—a sort of house," Bob answered. "But it's tumbled down now. That's all there is left of it," and, moving

a little farther up the trail, he pointed out the ruins of a weed-grown cottage. Little was left save the roof which had tumbled in, the walls having fallen, and parts of them having been burned by campers.

"No signs of any golden eagles around here," the man said, in no very disappointed tones, as far as Bob could judge. "But you never can tell. I'll tramp around a bit. I can find my way down all right, thank you. Will that pay you?" and he held out a five dollar bill to Bob.

"It's too much!"

"Oh, no, I think not. Take it. You may need it—for some of your detective disguises! I suppose you are taking a course by mail in some correspondence school," and he chuckled.

"Maybe," and Bob smiled, though there was a bit of anger in his heart. What was the use, though, of saying anything?

He went down the mountain trail, making much better time than in going up. He hurried home, and, later that day could have been seen riding his bicycle out of town. Before he left, however, he stopped at Clayton's garage.

"Yes, a man left his wheel here," Bob was told by the car washer. "A man with a gun. Said he'd stop back for it this evening."

"I guess he will, then," observed Bob. "He's up on Chestnut Mountain now. Well, so long!"

"So long, Bob! Where'd you get that old ramshackle of a wheel?"

"Oh, it's been out in our barn a long time," answered Bob. "I used to ride it a lot, and it's good yet."

"Well, don't fall off and break your neck," advised the man as he played the hose on a new and shiny sedan that had been left for a cleaning. "If you ask Clayton, he might let you take that old rattle box of a flivver we got."

"Thanks, I guess I can make out on my bike," answered Bob.

And then he rode on, off on a trail that was to have a strange ending.

CHAPTER IX

THE LONELY HOUSE

QUITE definite, in his own mind, was the object Bob Dexter had in view when he started off on this strange quest. It was a daring project, to say the least, and perhaps an older person would not have dreamed of attempting it. But Bob had the joyous and audacious qualities of youth, and among these was "taking a chance," as he expressed it to his chums, later.

"Jimminity crickets! I wish you'd taken me along!" murmured Ned, when told of what had happened.

"Same here!" echoed Harry.

"It was too risky," Bob said. "I had to work alone. The best detectives do that way, and I'm going to be one of the best."

Bob was simple and sincere when he said this. He really had an ambition to become a "sleuth" in a big city, the sort of man who knows criminals on sight, the "detective with the camera eye."

Those, and other thoughts, raced through his brain as he pedaled on his way to Atwell, a town

about ten miles from Cliffside, where Mr. Korth, that strange hunter, had said he lived.

"And he may live there all right," murmured Bob to himself, as he bent low over the handle bars, to work his way up a long hill. "But he isn't any eagle hunter—that's all bosh. I don't know whether he was stringing me, or whether he's a detective himself, on the trail of the missing golden eagle. Mr. Sanbarth may have hired him without saying anything about it. Maybe Mr. Sanbarth thinks I'm no good! But I'll show him and the others, too!" Bob told himself, just a bit fiercely. "I'll locate the golden eagle—if there's anything left of it, and I'll find out who took the silver cups!"

Half way between Atwell and Cliffside, Bob wheeled through the village of Ardmore. Passing along the main street, one of the few in the town, he was hailed by a lad who called:

"Hey, Bob, where you going?"

Bob shot back a quick look and recognized a lad who had played football on the Ardmore team —Bob had opposed him in a fiercely-fought game, when Bob carried off the honors for Cliffside. The two were good friends, in spite of the violence with which they played against each other.

"Oh, just taking a ride!" was Bob's answer.

"Can't you stop off?" invited Jimmie Thorn, who had run alongside Bob's wheel as the latter slowed up a bit

"No, thanks, I'm on my way. See you later, Jimmie! So long!" and Bob was speeding away.

"Hum!" mused Jimmie as he turned back to join a chum with whom he had been walking when he spied Bob. "I guess he's on some case."

"Case? What sort of case—case of soda water?" chuckled Tom Norton.

"No, a detective case."

"What! That kid a detective? Come off! What you giving me?"

"That's right!" asserted Jimmie earnestly. "You mayn't think so, but Bob has solved a lot of mysteries. Why some one stole a new football his club had for a game, and he found it for them."

"How? Did he see it bouncing down the street and pick it up?" Tom Norton evidently didn't have much faith in Bob.

"No, it wasn't that way at all. But he saw a tough lad with a queer kind of shoelace—it was part of the thong that laces up a football after it's inflated. Bob followed this fellow, went to his house and found the ball hidden in the woodshed. The kid had stolen it, and, wanting a shoelace that morning, took the lacing from the ball. But Bob spotted him."

"Well, that's pretty good," agreed Tom. "But does he do any real detective work?"

"Of course he isn't a professional," admitted Jimmie. "But he's pretty good all the same. I

wish he'd stopped off. I'd like to know what sort of a case he's on now."

But Bob had his own reasons for wanting to be alone on this particular occasion. And he was glad that his uncle and aunt were out so that he could remain away for several hours yet.

It was in the dusk of evening that he rode into Atwell, and his first thought was to get something to eat. Pedaling to a modest restaurant, he washed some of the dust of his journey from hands and face, and ordered a substantial meal.

"For maybe I'll be up all night," mused Bob, including a strong cup of coffee in his order. "The coffee will keep me awake."

Bob had read many detective stories—some of them very poor ones indeed, and he had also studied the methods used by real and efficient sleuths of the big cities. He knew that the solution of many a mystery has depended on little things—small matters that the casual observer would overlook. And it is because some persons can rise out of the class of casual observers that they make good detectives. Bob hoped he was in the unusual class, and some things that had happened seemed to justify this thought.

"Is there a city directory around here?" asked Bob of the waiter, who set the meal before him. "I used to have a friend living here, and I want to look him up." This was true enough—Bob had

known a lad living in Atwell, but this was some years previous.

"City directory?" laughed the waiter. "What do you think this is—New York? Say, it's a dead town, kid, take it from me! It would be a pretty small directory that they'd need here."

"Maybe there's a telephone book, then," suggested Bob. "That might do."

"Yes, there's that—such as it is," and the waiter's voice held a sneer. Evidently he was not a townsman, with a proper pride in the reputation of Atwell.

"Thanks, I'll look at it later," Bob said as he went on eating. He preferred learning where Mr. Korth's house was located from some sort of a book, rather than asking directly. A book was a silent witness—it would not talk afterward. And things might happen that would cause Bob to wish to be forgotten in that town.

The telephone directory—a small, local one—gave him the desired information, indicating the name of the street on which the Korth house was located. But even then Bob did not ask the waiter how to reach this particular thoroughfare.

He waited until he was again out on the street, and then, riding along, under the uncertain glow of the gas lamps in the street, he inquired of a man on the corner.

"Stanton Street—— Oh, that's quite a ways out

of town," was the answer to his inquiry. "'Tisn't much built up there. Only a few houses on it. Who was it you wanted to find?"

"Does a man named Smith live out there?" Bob wanted to know. Smith was the commonest name he could think of.

"What Smith?" countered the person of whom he had asked the direction.

"I think he's in the lumber business," ventured Bob, making a stab in the dark.

"Never heard of him," and the man shook his head. "But tell you what you do. Ride out there, and you'll see a big house. It belongs to a man named Korth—it's the first house after you cross a little white bridge—you can't miss it. Ask there."

"Thanks," called back Bob, as he rode away into the half darkness of the poorly-lighted town. But this suited him—he didn't want to be seen by anyone who might know him, and he had adopted no disguise—he seldom did, except, perhaps, to put on ragged clothes and make up as a typical barefooted country lad.

Stanton Street was, indeed, sparsely settled. There were only a few houses on it in that portion of it near the town, and after passing a small collection of nondescript residences, Bob began to think the thoroughfare was going to peter out into nothing. He rode along for nearly a mile, his

bicycle lamp giving the only illumination, and saw neither a house nor a white bridge.

"I wonder if I'm on the right track or not?" mused Bob to himself as he slowly let his wheel come to a stop on the grass beside the road, and steadied himself by leaning up against a fence post. "This cruising around in the dark, in strange waters isn't all it's cracked up to be. Wish I could pick up a buoy or a lighthouse—or something," he went on, carrying out the similie of seaman's talk he had unconsciously started. "But I reckon I'll have to do it by dead reckoning. Well, no use standing here trying to guess what's going to happen. Better get a move on. But I'll scout a bit on foot before I bike along. I can go slower that way and size up what I see."

With this end in view he walked slowly along the grass at the side of the highway. The turf made a soft pad for his feet and his bicycle, having rubber tires, was very silent so that he proceeded in the semi-darkness almost as noiselessly as a shadow, and very much like one.

It was while thus progressing that Bob Dexter reached a sort of cross road, extending at right angles to the main thoroughfare along which he had been traveling. It was hardly a road—more like a footpath, and yet wider than that. And so close did the bushes grow on either side of the principal highway that this little cross road was

almost hidden from sight until one was right upon it.

"I'd have missed it altogether if I had been wheeling along," mused Bob. "Good thing I was walking. Though I don't know as I want to take to this—it's more like an Indian trail. Still it might be a good thing to know about in case I'm chased—and I'm likely to be chased—I got to hand that to myself. Yes, this little side road might come in very handy. Wonder if I've got time to prospect down it a bit and see where it leads? Trouble is that I'd have to go both ways from the main road. Guess I'd better not. I'll keep on to the house of mystery."

Bob had halted at the intersection, and he looked first to the right and then to the left. Nothing could be seen, however. The side trail was shrouded in darkness, and the lad was congratulating himself on his decision not to prospect it, when his thoughts had a sudden interruption.

The interruption was in the shape of a girl—Bob could tell that even in the dark—a girl who fairly rushed up to him, almost overwhelming him in her eagerness. However as Bob was walking and pushing his wheel, the bike served to steady both him and her.

"Oh!" she gasped. And again: "Oh!"

"I beg your pardon," murmured Bob, though really there was no reason why he should have

done so. Rather it was her part to have apologized for having bumped into him—which she actually did.

"I—I couldn't help it," she went on. "It's so dreadful—I—I just had to run. Some one ought to come right away and help him. He's down by the spring house—he needs a doctor, I'm sure. Are you one—by any chance?"

"No," answered Bob, smiling under cover of the darkness, "I'm not. But maybe I can get you one. Who needs a doctor? Some of your folks sick?"

"No—thank goodness. It's an old man—a bald-headed man, and he has a queer cart with him—it upset—or he fell over it—down near the mineral spring. I just came past him—maybe he's dead! Oh, wouldn't it be dreadful? Do you think you can help? I was going on to the village—there's no one home at our house or I'd go back there."

"I'll come with you," offered Bob, noting by the glare of his bicycle lamp that the girl was about fifteen years old. "You show me where he is and I'll get help. You can tell me about it on the way."

"Goodness, I don't know anything about it!" exclaimed the girl. "I was coming along the short cut. Evelyn Chambers and I are going to a party and I was to call for her. I live on the Hamilton road, but I cut through this way."

"I should think you'd have been afraid in the dark," broke in Bob.

"Afraid? No—but I was when I saw the old man with his shining bald head lying on the road. Anyhow I had my flashlight—I turned it on him after I saw a dark heap. Then I ran!"

"Bald-headed," murmured Bob. "Did he have blue eyes?"

"Oh, my! As if I stopped to see *that!* But he had a queer cart with him loaded with dolls, I think. He must be a doll peddler."

"Punch and Judy show I think," corrected Bob. "I guess I know who he is. A Mr. Purdy—traveling Punch and Judy man." Ned and Harry had told him of their encounter with the odd character.

A little later Bob was bending over the huddled form of the Punch and Judy man, for he it was.

"Is he—is he dead?" faltered Mabel Pander, as she had identified herself.

"No, I think not," answered Bob, after a quick inspection. "He seems to have had a poke on the head—it's cut a little. But he's breathing all right. He ought to have a doctor."

"You can telephone from our house," offered Mabel. "I never thought of that. Stupid of me. Come on—that is if you can leave him alone."

"Oh, he'll be all right—may come to all of himself," the young detective said. "But it's best to get a doctor."

On the way to her home—not far off—Mabel told how, in coming along the short cut to her friend's house, she had seen the huddled heap of humanity near a wayside mineral spring.

"Lots of people come here to drink the water," she volunteered. "They think it does them good. I don't like it—tastes like sulphur. I guess this Mr. Purdy must have come to get some and he slipped."

"I guess so," agreed Bob, and a little later, when a hastily-summoned doctor had arrived, it was found that this was the explanation. Mabel delayed her departure for the party long enough to offer the use of her home as a sort of hospital in case it was needed, but it wasn't. Dr. Porter soon brought the old showman around.

He recognized Bob, for Ned and Harry had introduced their chum at a chance meeting that same day, and Mr. Purdy smiled at the young sleuth.

"Foolish of me to fall and whang my head on a rock," he said, a bit weakly, for that was what happened. "I had finished my show earlier than usual, and I wanted to drink some of this mineral water I'd heard about. I came this way, and when I was leaning over I felt suddenly dizzy. That's all I remember."

"Liver a bit out of order," the doctor said. "Some of the sulphur water wouldn't be bad for

you. But I'll send you to the hospital for the night. You'll be all right in the morning."

"Glad of that," murmured the proprietor of Mr. Punch. "The show must go on, you know. Much obliged to you," and he looked keenly at Bob.

"Oh, don't thank me—it was this young lady," and the lad nodded at Mabel.

"To you then," and the showman smiled at her.

"I'm glad I found some one to help you," she said with a shy look at Bob. "Guess I'll be going on now."

"And I must be on my way," commented the lad. "Unless you want me to help you, Mr. Purdy."

"Thank you—no. I'll be all right. Queer that stones should play such a part between me and you boys. One of your chums hits my Mr. Punch with a rock and you come along after I hit myself."

"It's a queer world," chuckled the medical man.

The old man was put in the doctor's auto and taken to the hospital, after the Punch and Judy show had been safely housed for the night in Mabel's home. Then Bob, musing on the strange events of the night, went on his way. By judicious questioning he had found out that he was on the right road, but after going on some little distance, and not picking up any of the land marks he had been told to look for, he again began to have his doubts.

"I wonder if I'm right?" he asked himself, more than once. I'll go on a bit farther. That bridge

I've been looking for must have been moved. Maybe Mr. Punch had something to do with it. But I guess folks in the country have very liberal ideas as to what a mile is. They said two miles, but I've come four if I have one."

He pedaled on a bit farther, and still saw nothing that looked like a white bridge.

"Guess I'm off the trail," mused the lad. "Yet the road didn't fork that I saw. I might have done better than to come after dark, but it seemed the best thing to do. Anyhow, I think I'm ahead of Korth, whatever his game is."

He pedaled on, a bit uncertainly, and then, suddenly, in the focus of his powerful headlight, for he had attached to his wheel one operated by a dry, storage battery, he saw, gleaming ahead of him, the kingbeams of a small, white bridge.

"I'm all right, after all," mused Bob. "Now for the house."

He saw it a few hundred yards farther on—a lonely house, set back from the road—a large house, dark and silent—the very abode of mystery it seemed to the lad.

He stopped his wheel a little short of the dwelling and looked toward it. Not a light gleamed. Not a whisper came from it. The silence of the night was broken only by the monotonous trilling of crickets, and the occasional hoarse challenge of a bull frog in a distant swamp.

As the young detective stood there in the gloom, looking toward what needed little imagination to turn into a house of mystery, there came suddenly over him a feeling that perhaps, after all, it might be better to drop the whole thing.

"I can get out of it now, if I want to," Bob told himself, "and it wouldn't be any disgrace, either. I can just say the affair isn't worth bothering with!

"But I'm not going to be a quitter!" he exclaimed fiercely, muttering the words to himself. "I couldn't do that. I'll go on with it as far as I can, even if I don't find out a thing. That place looks gloomy and silent enough to conceal a murder, though I hope that isn't going to happen."

He looked about him. The silence was still deep, broken only by the natural noises of the night. Then the lad took a deep breath and squared his shoulders.

"Now for it," murmured Bob, as he hid his wheel in the roadside bushes and began to make his way, crouchingly, toward the silent and dark house.

CHAPTER X

BOB IS CAUGHT

WHAT Bob Dexter planned to do was, in the strict sense of the word, not exactly legal. I am by no means justifying him, but he justified himself with the thought that it was for a good purpose, and could harm no one. Not exactly correct reasoning, and I hope none of you will be swayed by our hero's use of it, nor by his example. I am merely telling you what he did, leaving you to draw your own conclusions.

"I rather wish he'd left some lights on," mused Bob, as he made his silent way toward the dark house. "It would have made it easier for me."

To a casual observer, who would have been justified in concluding that Bob was about to enter the house by stealth, his wish for lights seemed a bit odd.

But Bob's plans, at least his first, tentative ones, did not include entering the house. Hence his wish for light was in accord with his ideas. He wanted to get a look at the interior from without, and he

could see little unless some of the rooms were lighted.

However he had with him a powerful electric flashlight, and if there should be rooms where the curtains were up, he might get glimpses of what such apartments contained. That, in the main, was his idea in coming to Mr. Korth's home.

But events, and the situation, Fate, if you like, caused Bob to change his plan of operations.

He advanced slowly, and, being a boy who had played all sorts of games, from hide and go seek to hare and hounds, he was an adept, as most lads are, in sneaking up to a spot he wished to reach without making more than a very small amount of noise. In this case the approach of the young detective was almost as silent and quiet as the dark house itself.

Pausing now and then, Bob listened intently. But the only noises that came to his ears were the persistent ones of the crickets and the big bull frog.

"Sounds like Old Marietta's," mused the lad. "Must be a big one. Wonder if it's bigger than hers! Wish I could see them together. They'd make a great team."

He smiled at this idea, and moved on. Once he stepped on a dry twig which broke, in the silence, with a report like that of a gun—at least so Bob thought, and he froze in his tracks and crouched down.

But, aside from causing a cessation in the everlasting song of the crickets, which insects are easily startled, no notice seemed to be taken of the disturbance. No sign nor sound came from the dark house.

"Croak-oak-oak-er-ung!" boomed out the big frog, and it was as though he were laughing at Bob's needless fright. For needless it was.

"Whew!" whispered the lad to himself, as he again resumed his stealthy progress, after waiting to make sure his presence was not observed. "I thought I was a goner then!"

Shielding the light of his powerful flash torch by his hands, Bob cast a small part of the beam on the ground. He wanted to keep to a path that would lead to one of the side windows, and presently he reached his goal.

"Lucky there isn't a dog around here," mused the young detective. "But if there was one he'd have barked long ago."

Reaching a low window, Bob had his first disappointment, for the shade was drawn down low, and it was a shade of the heavy, green variety, as opaque as a piece of tarred paper.

"Nothing doing here," sighed the lad. He had hoped to be able to flash his light in through the window, to see what manner of house it was where lived that strange hunter, who was on the quest of a golden eagle.

In turn Bob visited all the windows that could be approached from the ground, and then, taking a careful look around, as well as he could by the light of many brilliant stars, he approached the front door, which contained large plate glass panels.

"Korth can't be home yet, I guess the coast is clear," mused the lad. "It's taking a chance—but that's what I have to do."

Thus he justified himself as he went on tiptoe up the steps, but he might have saved himself the effort, for though there were no shades on the door glasses, he could see but little in the hall. That it was the house of a man in comfortable circumstances was made evident by the objects in the focus of the rays of Bob's torch.

Then Bob made his big decision.

"I'm going in!" he decided. "I don't intend any harm—I just want to get a look around. There's nobody home, that's sure, or they'd have spotted me before this. If I'm caught I can say I wanted to see Mr. Korth—and I do want to see him. I want to ask him why he is so anxious to get a golden eagle. And I want to find out if he saw any traces of a nest of them on Chestnut Mountain this afternoon."

So making excuses for himself, and again I warn you that I am not in the least upholding Bob in what he did, he cautiously tried the front door. It was firmly locked, as he had feared.

"Well, I'll have to try a window," he mused. "I think I saw one raised a bit. If it was only a pantry window now I might find a piece of pie. I'm getting hungry."

Bob was human after all, you see, and he was aware of the fact that he had a stomach. Though it was not long since he had eaten, still he had visions of pie.

However it wasn't a pantry window that, after some investigation, he discovered to be raised enough so that he could get his hands beneath the sash. It was another sash, and to open it took hard work, but he managed to raise it enough so that he could crawl in. He had often done the trick at his uncle's house when he had been unexpectedly locked out.

Had Bob been discovered as he was scrambling in through the window of a house where he had no right to enter, there might have been an embarrassing moment for him, to say the least. And had there been anyone alert in the residence, the consequences might have been serious—some one might have shot first and asked questions later.

But the lad was quite sure, in his own mind, that not a soul was in the place. Hence he acted boldly, and, I am bound to say, rashly. As to the legal end of it, you know my opinion about that also.

The window which Bob raised went up, after being started, so easily that, as he said, afterward,

it must have been in the habit of being used to let in surreptitious visitors. Only Bob didn't say it exactly that way.

"Sneak in," was his expression.

However the window never so much as squeaked, but slid up in the grooved frame and made space through which Bob could scramble. This he did, in the most approved burglarous fashion, and he found himself in a sort of reception room, back of the main hall.

A quick glance about, as he flashed on his light and turned it off again, showed the lad that he was in the home of a man of refinement and some wealth. And it needed only a few steps, taking him to another apartment opening out of the reception room, to bring the young detective into a large laboratory—at least Bob judged it to be a laboratory from the pieces of strange apparatus scattered about.

"He's a scientist all right," thought the lad, "though what his line is I can't say. Can't see what it has to do with golden eagles. Say, but he's got a nifty lot of stuff!" and Bob looked with envy and admiration on queer pieces of machinery —electrical, most of it, he judged. Bob had a leaning toward science himself, and had done well in that branch at school.

He took in a good part of the contents of the room with his eyes as he flashed his light on and

off with a quick motion of his thumb on the switch. He gave a comprehensive swing to the electric torch, making sure, in his own mind, that no one was in the room.

There was one machine that Bob was particularly interested in. This was one with large glass wheels, which, revolving between arms of brass, studded with many points, generated electricity by friction. Doubtless you lads have them in your school laboratories, but this one was very large and powerful.

Forgetting, for a moment, the particular quest that had brought him, in this burglarous fashion into the strange, silent house, Bob approached the generator with a view of more closely examining it.

He had taken but a few cautious steps, however when he was startled by a clicking sound. First he thought his foot had struck against something on the floor. But as he wore rubber shoes he knew this could not have caused the sound.

"Maybe that blooming machine is going to start up by itself," the lad whispered to himself. "If it does it'll give a big spark and maybe a shock."

The lad was beginning to feel that perhaps he had not used enough caution on this quest of the night. True he had made his way into the house without difficulty. But that might mean nothing. In fact it might be just a trick to entice him within, so that he might be summarily dealt with.

"Maybe it's a case of the spider and the fly," thought Bob with a grim smile. "The old spider stays up in a nook of his web, waiting until the fly walks into his parlor. And then the spider gets busy. Well, if I'm the fly I'm going to do a lot of buzzing around before I'm caught," he went on.

"And I'd like to see what sort of a spider is in this web, anyhow," he added, looking about the room, which, under other circumstances, would have been a delightful place to him. For the lad was a student of natural science.

"I wonder if I would get a shock if I touched that static machine?" the young detective asked himself in a whisper.

But Bob had a shock of another sort a moment later when, following another click, the room was flooded with light.

The lad started and uttered an exclamation, as well he might.

For, confronting him, and smiling at him from a doorway was Herman Korth—the strange seeker of the golden eagle.

"Well, my young detective, how are you?" asked the man calmly.

CHAPTER XI

GOLDEN FEATHERS

"UM—er—I—now I didn't know you were here," stammered Bob. He was clearly taken at a disadvantage—no need to admit this in so many words. His manner clearly indicated that, and Mr. Korth was fully aware of the fact.

"I judged as much," said the scientist calmly. "I have been watching you for some time, wondering what your object was."

"Watch—watching me?" faltered Bob.

"Yes. I heard you raise the window. Hidden in the darkness, I saw you come in. I recognized you at once, my young detective, but I haven't yet been able to puzzle out why you came here."

Bob was between two fires. He did not want to admit the real reason for his nocturnal visit, and he did not want to lie. He never did that, though he was strictly within his rights, at times, when he did not fully answer those who had no right to ask questions.

This time Mr. Korth had right, as well as might on his side, and Bob decided on a sort of half-way

measure. That is he would give one of his reasons for entering the house. The other reason he had a right to keep to himself, he thought.

"I came here to see what sort of a man you were," he admitted, simply. "It seemed very strange to me, after what had happened at our club house, that you should be after a golden eagle on Chestnut Mountain. So I came here to find out more about you."

"And you thought I was still on the mountain, I suppose?" asked the man.

"Yes," admitted Bob. "I didn't think you'd get here so soon. You didn't pass me on the road. I was looking for your bike."

"My bicycle and I parted company, after I came down the mountain," stated the scientist grimly. "It was a sort of forcible parting, and what remains of the bike is there on the road yet. So I had to take the train over from Cliffside. That brought me here just before dark."

"Oh!" murmured Bob. He had not counted on an accident, nor the possibility that Mr. Korth might come back by train. The young sleuth then and there decided that he must broaden his scope of possibilities and probabilities in working on cases. The lesson would not be lost on him.

"Yes, I got here before you did," went on Mr. Korth, and his smile was replaced by a sterner look, while his voice had lost some of its pleasantness.

"And, now that you are here, neither on invitation or request, as a lawyer might say, I think I am justified in asking you why. Why did you come like a thief in the night? Indeed I would be within my rights if I considered you a thief and handed you over to the police."

"Oh—er—I wish you wouldn't do that!" begged Bob. Then, with a manly air he added. "Of course that's your right, and I admit it looks rather bad for me. But I had a good object in coming here, and I haven't taken a thing, nor done any harm. I am willing to go to the police with you and let them question me."

"Um," mused the scientist, who still stood in the doorway of his laboratory gazing at the hapless Bob. "If I hadn't thought you honest, and willing to explain yourself, I would have called the police when I first saw you enter. As it is—well, just why did you come here?"

"I wanted to see what sort of a man you were," declared Bob. "It was a queer tale you told—of wanting to get a specimen of a golden eagle, when one—our mascot—has been taken from our club house."

"I care nothing for what has taken place at your club house," was the calm comment, "but I assure you I am sincere in my efforts to get a golden eagle. I am, as you may have guessed, a man of science. I am working to prove a certain story theory of

mine in regard to birds of prey, especially golden eagles. Therefore I wanted a specimen, either dead or alive. I had heard the story of the golden eagle of Chestnut Mountain, and so I went there. I encountered you, but I had no idea you would slip in on me this way."

"I'm sorry," faltered Bob. "Perhaps I shouldn't have done it."

"There is no doubt of it—of course you shouldn't have done it!" declared Mr. Korth. "And, as I said, I would be justified in handing you over to the police. Your explanation, so far, isn't very convincing. And, under the circumstances——"

He ceased speaking and seemed to be listening. Bob also strained his ears to catch a distant sound in the strange, silent house.

He heard the noise as of approaching footsteps, which echoed through the rooms.

"Massa! Massa Herman, where is yo'!" called a voice, unmistakably that of a colored servant. And there was a peculiar quality in the voice. It was not exactly that of an American negro of the south. It was more like some West Indian, Bob thought.

However he had little time for speculation, for the hunter, or scientist (Bob spoke of him in both terms) made answer:

"Here I am, Bora! What is it?"

There shuffled through the doorway, out of which

Mr. Korth had stepped, an aged colored man, and Bob's first glimpse of him confirmed the lad in his guess that the servant was a native of some foreign land—just which one, save that it must be where the black race predominated, Bob could not tell.

"Been lookin' fo' yo' all around, massa," went on the servant, who had been addressed by the name Bora. "I think maybe yo' sleep."

"No, not so early, Bora. But what is it? Oh, it's all right—this young man is—er—a guest of mine," and Mr. Korth waved his hand toward Bob, at whom the colored man was strangely staring.

Bob breathed a sigh of relief. Clearly if his "host" had spoken of him as a "guest," there was no intention of handing Bob over to the police.

"Stay all night?" questioned Bora, evidently with a view of making up the guest room in readiness for an occupant.

"No, he is going directly," stated the scientist. "I am going to let you go," he said, a bit sternly, "and I warn you not to come here again. I accept your story for what it is worth, but heed my warning."

"Yes, sir," answered Bob, satisfied to let it go at this, now.

"What is it, Bora?" asked the hunter, as he turned from Bob.

Instead of openly announcing the message on

which he had evidently come, the colored man leaned over and whispered in his master's ear. The latter gave a start of surprise.

"Are you sure?" he inquired, sharply.

"Very sure, massa," was the answer.

"I will go at once! It is too good a chance to miss!" was the comment. "You will find your way out in that direction," said Mr. Korth, pointing toward the front door. "Bora will unlock it for you. And mind—don't come back!"

Bob was a bit humiliated. His excursion into strange realms was not turning out at all as he had hoped. Still he must make the best of it.

Turning abruptly, the hunter started back along the way whence the colored man had come with his whispered message. Bora, after a look to see where his master was going, approached Bob.

"Yo' come—I let yo' out," he murmured. Nor did he seem surprised after his first glance of curiosity at the young detective. Of course Bora didn't know Bob was a sleuth. And, to be frank with you, our hero himself didn't feel much like one just then.

Leading the way through dimly lighted rooms, filled with substantial furniture, and with objects of art scattered about, as Bob could see, the colored man brought him to the front hall. It was dark here, and the servant fumbled against the wall, evi-

dently searching for an electric switch before he unlocked the front door.

He must have pressed the wrong button, as one will often do in the darkness, particularly where several switches are on the same brass plate. So, instead of illuminating the hall, Bora lighted a small room opening out of it.

"Ugh! Got wrong pig by de ear!" mumbled the colored man, showing that he had a sense of humor. He switched off the light from the small room, and began feeling about for the right button.

But before the room, thus suddenly made brilliant, had gone dark again, Bob had a look in it. And his heart almost stopped beating as he saw, standing on a table in the room, a bird with a cruel, hooked beak—a bird with sharp talons, a bird with golden feathers that gleamed yellow in the electric light!

"The golden eagle!" was the thought that shot through Bob's brain. "I've found it—just as I thought I would! The golden eagle is here!"

A second later the hall light was switched on, and the colored man had opened the door.

"This way out!" he said, with unconscious sarcasm.

CHAPTER XII

AN ATTACK IN THE DARK

BOB DEXTER hesitated for a moment. A regular riot of thoughts ran through his head. He at once formed, and as soon dismissed, many plans of action, all in the briefest period of time. They all centered, however, on getting that stuffed eagle of which he had just a glimpse.

"If that isn't our club mascot I'm a Chinaman!" thought Bob. "I had reason to suspect this man. Now how can I get the bird?"

Truly it did seem difficult, for there, holding the front door open, and waiting for Bob to make his exit, was the colored servant—a husky individual if ever there was one. Little chance of making a rush for the eagle, securing it and making his escape, Bob realized.

Of course he could go back to Cliffside, report the matter to the police, and to Mr. Sanbarth, and legal measures would be taken to get back the club's property.

"But I don't want to do it that way," mused Bob. "I want to get this myself. What's the use

of having the name of a detective if I have to call on the regular police?" He smiled grimly. "Besides," he mused on, "if I don't take this now, I may not get another chance. It may not be here when the police arrive. But how can I——"

He was thinking thus to himself when there came a sudden interruption to his thoughts in the form of a call from Mr. Korth who had hastened to some other part of the house, or grounds, after his servant had delivered what seemed to be an important message.

"Oh, Bora!" came the summons.

"Yes, massa—comin'!" was the reply.

Then with a glance at Bob the man went on:

"You go now—good night!"

He gave the lad a gentle thrust to hasten his slow progress toward the door, and, before Bob quite knew what was happening he found himself out on the steps, and the door had closed behind him. He was on the opposite side of the portal from the golden eagle. He stared out into the darkness with bitter humiliation.

And then, suddenly, as though a voice had called it to him out of the gloom, there flashed into his mind the words:

"It didn't click!"

This might be meaningless to you or to me, but to Bob, whose mind worked in a peculiar manner, it meant much.

"It didn't click!"

It was the lock of the big front door that these words referred to, and Bob knew that he had been, unconsciously, listening for the click of the catch in the door jamb plate. That click had not sounded, showing that the door had not been pushed firmly enough shut to completely close it.

Dimly, on the other side of the portal, Bob could hear the retreating footsteps of Bora as he hastened to answer his master's summons. And then a bold thought entered into the mind of the young investigator.

Again I must admit that I can not defend Bob's conduct. Laws are laws, and are made for the purpose of mutual protection. Once a man "takes the law into his own hands," many wrongs are likely to result. And Bob did what, under some strict rulings, would be considered unlawful.

True, you might argue, if you see something of yours in the house of another person, which person has no right to the article, you have a right to go in and take it, even by force.

But the law does not admit this. The law provides certain means of recovering the article, and you are supposed to invoke the law. It may be that your way would be more sure, and much quicker, but that is not the point.

However, Bob Dexter, in the flush of seeing the golden eagle, was not stopping to argue fine points

of law. He wanted that mascot of his club and he was going to have it. The door was open. He did not have to force his way in, a point well recognized in law, and after waiting until he thought Bora was some distance away, the lad softly pushed on the door, turning the knob silently to prevent the latch from clicking.

To his delight the portal swung in on well-oiled hinges, and a moment later he was back in the hall he had so ignominiously left a little while before. The place was darkness, but that mattered little to the lad who had his flashlight in his pocket.

"Now for the golden eagle!" Bob told himself. "And maybe the fellows won't be surprised when they see me bringing it back. That reward Mr. Sanbarth offered won't come in bad, either! I should say no, indeed!"

With these, to him exceedingly pleasant thoughts surging through his mind, Bob, untroubled by any legal aspect of what he was doing, took out his little electric torch, and, shading the lens with his fingers, cautiously switched on the light.

His first care was to see he was unobserved, and a cautious look around did not show him either Mr. Korth or Bora. Whether or not there were other inmates of the strange dark and silent house, he did not know—he did not even stop to consider this.

Casting a beam of light into the small room

opening off the hall, Bob saw the bird with the golden feathers where he had first glimpsed it. And toward this he hastened, but moving quietly—making scarcely a sound.

Flashing his light over the bird, Bob made sure that it was the one which had stood so long on the shelf above the president's chair at the club.

The eagle had been prepared by a taxidermist to look as natural and life-like as possible. Bob had often admired the eagle at the club. This was the first time he had ever been this close to it—the first time he had ever taken it in his hands, as he was doing now.

"Well, I've got you—old bird!" whispered Bob to the stuffed specimen. "I guess I can tuck you under one arm and ride my wheel all right."

He had left the bicycle beneath some bushes along the road that led to Mr. Korth's house.

Though it may seem to you that Bob was delaying too much, where quick action was called for really the events since he had been rather unceremoniously thrust from the house had taken only a few seconds—hardly a minute in all.

He realized, as much as anyone, the need of haste. Now quickly putting his electric flash lamp back into his coat pocket, but leaving the switch on, so that a dull gleam showed through the cloth of his coat, the lad tucked the golden eagle under

his arm and glided toward the door which he had left open.

He had paused a moment to listen, but no sound came to him—not even the murmurs of the voices of Mr. Korth and his servant.

With his prize, Bob passed out, pulling the door partly shut after him, but not snapping it. He did not want the click to betray him, and, after all, he was but leaving it as he had found it.

A misty moon had now appeared on the scene, shining with rather a faint and watery aspect through light, fleecy clouds. This mellow lantern of the night gave Bob the best glimpse he had yet had of the grounds surrounding the strange house. They were extensive—these grounds—and the lad had a dim idea of tangled gardens, shrubbery, ornamental trees and, in the distance he caught the shimmer of water, as though the scientist had laid out a gold fish pond, or perhaps a pool where he raised frogs for experimental purposes.

Bob glanced toward the glimmering water, partly covered with broad leaves of pond lilies, and then the moon was veiled with the moving clouds.

"I'd rather have it that way," mused Bob. "Don't want them to see me—not with this bird. They might take it away!"

It took him a moment or two to get his bearings, for he had entered the house on the other side, and, coming out now, as he did, from the

front door, he had to locate himself. But Bob had what is called a "good sense of direction," and often, alone in some strange patch of woods, he had been able to find himself. This sense now served him a good turn, for it enabled him to pick out the place where he had entered the grounds.

Toward this spot he now made his way, making as little noise as possible. The moon gave him an intermittent light, and, noticing this, he turned off the electric torch in his pocket. For though there was only a faint gleam coming from it, filtered as it was by the thin cloth of his summer coat, still it might betray his presence.

"Guess I can manage to find my wheel all right without it," Bob mused, as he released the catch switch.

Thus he proceeded, the golden eagle under his arm, making his way along a path, lined on either side with what he took to be flowers and shrubs. Indeed the faint perfume of the blossoms was wafted to him on the gentle night wind as he walked along.

"No use keeping along this front path to the gate—if there is one," Bob reasoned. "Some one might be coming along and see me. And, though I have a right to what I've taken, I don't want to be stopped and taken back in there. I don't just like the looks of that colored man. He may carry a razor for all I know, though he looks like

a foreigner and maybe has some other sort of favorite weapon. But if I can keep out of their way so much the better."

With this end in view, Bob turned off to the left, though to make his way in that direction he saw, by the light of the moon, which was now shining more brightly, that he would have to pass through a clump of trees.

"But I reckon I can do that all right," he told himself. "My bike's just beyond there."

As he left the path, and was about to strike into the shrubbery that would, he thought, effectually conceal him, Bob paused a moment and listened. He heard nothing, save, as before, the croak of the frogs and the chirp of the crickets.

"All serene," he murmured, much pleased with himself and the success of his efforts. "This case is easier than I thought."

But, did Bob but know it, the case was really only just beginning. There was hard going ahead of the young detective.

Once again he moved forward, taking a firmer grip on the golden eagle so that it might not be damaged by his passage through the bushes and clump of trees. Taking advantage of every opening in the shrubbery, so as not to break off branches and so give an alarm, Bob at last managed to reach the little grove. It was just beyond this, he remembered, where he had left his wheel.

Bob was silently chuckling to himself at the success of his night's trip, and he was picturing the looks of astonishment on the faces of his boy chums when he should walk in the club house with the famous trophy when, suddenly, he heard a noise.

It was a noise different from the sounds of the night—the chirping of the crickets and the calling of the frogs. It was a sound different from the sighing of the night wind in the trees. It was a sound different from the rustle of the dried leaves that some snake, intent on a meal, might make in gliding along. It was not such a sound as a flitting owl would produce.

"Some one's coming!" thought Bob, stiffening to an instant stop.

He strained his ears to catch every atom of the new sound. There was the rustle of leaves, and the breaking of tiny twigs under foot.

Then, suddenly, and with almost as much of a shock as was brought about by the starting of the noise, there was silence—deep and profound silence.

Even the creatures of the woods—crickets, grasshoppers and little green frogs that live in the trees—all of them became silent also. It was uncanny—it was weird.

It was as though all the creatures of the night had also heard the sound that startled Bob, and were doing as he was doing—keeping still until they learned what it was that had disturbed them.

The lad, holding his breath that he might hear better, was painfully aware of the beating of his own heart. It seemed as if the sound of its pulsations would be heard a mile away. Bob found that he was straining his muscles, so tense was he standing. Then common sense came to comfort him.

"Maybe it's a dog," thought the boy. "Though I didn't hear any bark."

The sound came nearer. For a moment Bob was puzzled to locate it. Once he thought it was to his left, and again he was sure it was on his right.

Then, before he had time to swing about, he realized that the noise was behind him. And before he could tense his muscles to meet the attack he sensed was coming, some one sprang at him from out of the darkness, for now the moon was behind black clouds.

"Oh!" gasped Bob, partly in fear and surprise, and partly because the breath was driven from him by the sudden impact of the unknown attacker of the night. "Oh—look out!"

A moment later Bob Dexter went down heavily, his head striking on a stone, and then he seemed to be sinking down into some fathomless pit of blackness.

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTIVES

JUST how long he was stretched out there on the damp ground in the darkness, unconscious, Bob Dexter did not know exactly. It could not have been very long, however—by which I mean the period was measurable by hours. For when he opened his eyes, with a cold shiver, for his face was wet with dew, he saw, by the position of the moon, that it was not much past midnight.

Cold and unpleasant as was his condition, it was the dampness, very likely, that had restored him to his senses, much as does a dash of water in the face of some one who has fainted. For that is what happened to Bob when he fell, and his head struck a stone.

He gave himself a shake, following the convulsive shiver that brought his brain back to a working state, and then sat up.

"Ouch! Burr-r-r-r!" he murmured as a sharp pain shot through his head. "What happened?"

Then it all came back to him—slowly at first, and next with an overwhelming rush—the events of the

night—all that had taken place since he started from Cliffside on his wheel, hoping to get a chance to explore the home of Mr. Korth in the absence of that strange and suspected individual.

"Some one must have hit me quite a wallop," mused Bob, putting his hand tenderly to the back of his head. He felt a lump there, and a roughness and a matting of his hair that told him he had been cut and had bled some.

"Lucky it isn't any worse," he told himself grimly. "I wonder who that was—or what it was? I didn't get a chance to see. Might have been a bear. I wonder if he has a trained bear as a watch dog? More likely it was a dog—one of those Belgian police dogs, probably. They jump on a fellow and knock him down, but they don't bite. And yet I thought I felt hands—hands, not the paws of a dog. And the eagle—the golden eagle—it's gone!"

He determined this first by frantically feeling on the ground about him. His fingers not coming in contact with the feathers of the stuffed bird, he took out his flashlight and swung it in a circle about him as he sat on the earth. There was no sign of the club mascot.

"Well, they got it back all right," mused Bob. "That's what they came after and they got it back. They must have followed me from the house. It was that black Bora chap, I'll bet a cookie. And, speaking of cookies—I wish I had one now!"

The pain and dizzy sensation was passing, and Bob was feeling better in some ways and not so well in others. Hunger was now beginning to manifest itself.

Mentally, too, he had a sense of chagrin. Everything had seemed to be going so smoothly—already, in anticipation, he saw his triumphant entry with the recovered trophy—and now he had nothing—nothing but an aching and cut head.

"But I'll get the golden eagle back!" declared Bob fiercely to himself. "Now that I know where it is there won't be any trouble about it. I'll have to tell Mr. Sanbarth, and the police will have to get it, of course, but it will be my work just the same."

Consoled with this thought, Bob arose and shook his clothes into some sort of better shape on him, for he found he was considerably ruffled by his encounter with the unknown antagonist of the dark. Not that Bob had fought——

"There wasn't any time for that," he said, later. "He jumped on me from behind like a ton of coal, and I went down—and out!"

However, there was no use bemoaning that fact now. He had been bested in his first encounter with the strange forces at work, and must try another bout. He had half a notion to go back to the strange dark and silent house and demand the golden eagle. But a sober, and perhaps a better second thought,

showed him the futility of this course. He would not have been admitted—of that he was certain.

"But I'll have another go at it—as sure as kittens like milk!" he told himself.

Stepping out, cautiously at first, to make sure he had suffered no other injury than a cut head, Bob made his way through the woods and, after some little search, located his wheel.

"I wonder what your game is—that's what I wonder!" he said, half aloud as he looked back toward the house of mystery. "Why did you take our golden eagle—and why did you take our cups and break the trophies? What sort of a man are you, anyhow?"

These were questions Bob could not satisfactorily answer. The glimpse he had had of Mr. Korth, his brief association with him on Chestnut Mountain, did not bear out the theory that the scientist was a man who would become a vandal for the sake of getting a stuffed golden eagle—much as he might want such a specimen for his purposes.

"And what good would one eagle be to him, anyhow?" thought Bob.

The lad did not know that some scientists are obsessed with a perfect mania for establishing certain pet theories in regard to matters of natural or scientific history. I know one naturalist who has spent the greater part of his life attempting to prove that a certain species of Arctic seagull is allied with

another kind of gull. In order to do this he relies on certain markings on the wing feathers. And in his laboratory in the New York Natural History Museum this man had literally thousands of stuffed gulls, and more than ten thousand drawings and photographs of their feathers, arranged in sequence, all designed to show the recurrence of a certain peculiar mark in the wings.

Had Bob known this he might not have wondered why Mr. Korth should want a golden eagle—that is, assuming that he had taken the one from the Boys' Club.

"Well, it's more a mystery than I thought it was at first," mused Bob as he rode off down the road that led back to Cliffside.

He was feeling better each minute now, and, seeing a lunch wagon, with lights gleaming as he rode through Atwell, he stopped and had a cup of coffee and a sandwich, which made him feel distinctly better.

"Had a fall, didn't you?" asked the lunch wagon man, as Bob paid him and was leaving.

"A fall?" queried the young detective.

"Yes, I see your head's cut. Some blood on your collar."

"Oh, yes—I—er—had a fall," answered Bob, somewhat hesitatingly. "Yes, I fell."

"Had some myself, when I used to ride a wheel," commented the man. "Got a flivver now—they're

safer, but they make more noise. Want to wash your cut—I'll give you some water." He was kind and solicitous, Bob thought.

"Thank you, no," the boy answered. "It might start bleeding again. I'll soon be home now."

The food and hot coffee put new life into him and he was feeling almost like his own healthy self as he pedaled on through the darkness along the silent and deserted road. For it was now past midnight, as he observed from the clock in the church tower at Atwell.

"That you, Bob?" called the voice of his uncle from his bedroom as the lad, an hour later, let himself in.

"Yes, Uncle Joel," was the answer.

"Out a bit late; aren't you?" came the comment, not ill-natured, but kindly.

"Club business," answered Bob briefly. "I've been trying to find the golden eagle."

"Um!" murmured Mr. Dexter. "Well, don't go at it too hard, Bob. The world will keep on moving without that, you know."

"Yes, I know, but——"

"Oh, it's all right to want it back—don't blame you a bit," broke in Mr. Dexter quickly. "But don't wear yourself to a frazzle about it. Good night!"

"Good night," murmured Bob. But it was some time before he fell asleep.

Bob was finishing rather a late breakfast two mornings after this, when he heard a hail in the yard.

"Oh, Bob! Come on fishing!"

Harry and Ned, with their poles over their shoulders, were gayly skylarking outside.

"Fishing?" queried Bob, more to gain time than because he had not heard what they said.

"Sure," went on Ned. "It's a swell day!"

"We got worms," added Harry, meaning that the bait was provided.

"Oh, I don't know," spoke Bob, hesitatingly. "I got to go——"

"What is it—that golden eagle business?" asked Ned.

"Say, did you hear there was a fellow over on Chestnut Mountain Tuesday looking for them—I mean looking for eagles to shoot?" inquired Harry.

"Yes, I heard about it," spoke Bob. "No thanks, I guess I won't go fishing to-day." He wanted to go back to Atwell and have a look by daylight at the house of mystery.

"All right," agreed Ned. He and his chum knew better than to press Bob, once the latter had made up his mind. "See you later."

Harry, however, wanted to make one last appeal.

"Hey, Bob!" he called.

"Shoot!" succinctly answered the young detective, turning as he started to progress toward the barn.

"Doing anything special?" asked Harry.

"No, nothing special," replied Bob.

"Then why don't you come?" urged the other. "It's a fine day for fishing."

Bob seemed to be considering the matter. He did not wish his chums to guess his real object in his refusal to join them, nor did he want them to consider that he was too "high hat" to join them. He was casting about in his mind for a good answer, and found it in the weather.

"Wind's wrong for fishing," he said, with sudden inspiration.

"Rats!" ejaculated Ned with a laugh.

"Never knew 'em to bite better than this day last week, and the wind was just the same," added Harry.

"I never have any luck when it's like this," rejoined Bob, and to put an end to the cajoling of his chums he went on: "I can't go—that's flat. Got to go down to the meadow and catch Flyaway."

"That won't take you long," said Harry. "The old nag will come right up and eat out of your hand if you hold out your hat like it had oats in."

"Or take a bit of salt," added Ned.

"Nope. Can't do it," said Bob. "And Flyaway isn't as easy to catch as you think. Once he takes a notion in his head——"

Bob did not finish, but shook his own head as if it might be filled with many weighty problems—as, indeed, it was, in a way.

"Want any help with that race-horse of your uncle's?" laughingly asked Ned as he and Harry turned down the road.

"No, thanks. I can manage. See you later."

Truth to tell, Flyaway was a sudden inspiration on the part of Bob Dexter. As you have guessed, the animal was a horse. Flyaway wasn't its name, the "nag" having been more fittingly christened "Jim" some years before. But Jim was such a slow poke, ambling along at such an easy pace, whenever he did amble, that Bob and the boys had fastened on the creature the name "Flyaway," which Jim hardly ever did.

Now it happened that Bob's uncle had said to him, about a week before:

"Bob, when you get a good chance, and there aren't any mysterious detective cases that need your attention, you might catch Jim and take him to the blacksmith. He ought to be shod, for I aim to use him hauling wood in a few weeks."

"All right, uncle," Bob had answered. "I'll attend to it."

In his business Mr. Dexter used two automobiles, and Jim, who, before the days of the gasoline carts, had done the hauling, had been pensioned off, so to speak. But Mr. Dexter and his wife were old-fashioned persons, in a way, and liked, in the winter and fall, to sit before an open fire of blazing logs in the evening. To this end Mr. Dexter had a large

fireplace in his house, and each year he had hauled in from a wood lot he owned enough logs to last all winter.

It was the duty of Flyaway to do this hauling, since the road to the timber land was not one on which an auto could be used. And while most of the time Jim, or Flyaway, was allowed to spend his days in the pasture, or, at most, doing a little plowing and cultivating in the spring, getting in the wood was his most exacting duty. As the road to the wood lot was a rough one, the horse needed to be shod, and Bob generally looked after this.

It had suddenly occurred to him to do this now, when Ned and Harry had urged him to come fishing with them. No better excuse could have been thought of than to go down and catch Flyaway and take him to the blacksmith shop at the distant end of the village.

"I can kill enough time catching the nag and riding him to the shop to let those fellows get out of the way," mused Bob.

His heart rather smote him for this passing up of his life-long chums, but he felt, in this case, that the action was justified. Bob certainly could not do detective work accompanied by two lively lads, who, however much they might be in sympathy with his object, could be of little help.

"They'd keep putting their feet in all the while," mused Bob.

So, after he had watched Harry and Ned go down the road on their way to the fishing hole, the young detective went to the house and called to his aunt:

"I'm going to catch old Jim and have him shod."

"Yes," was the answer. "Your uncle will be glad of that. He was asking me, only this morning, if you had attended to it. You'll surely do it now, will you, Bob?"

"Oh, yes; sure I will."

"Well, I'm glad of it. Better take some salt with you. Jim's terrible fond of salt. He can smell it clear across the pasture, I think, and he'll come right up to you."

"All right," assented Bob, and he accepted a paper bag of the white crystals his aunt gave him, and started off down the street whistling.

The pasture where Jim, or Flyaway, roamed at his own sweet will, was some distance from the Dexter home, but Bob did not mind the walk. In fact he rather welcomed it, since it gave him time to think and to marshal in his mind a number of conflicting facts.

"I've got to do a lot of thinking to get this case where I want it," mused Bob as he strolled along.

He carried a halter which he intended to slip over the head of the horse, and by it ride him to the blacksmith's. There was an old blanket hidden in a hollow tree in the field—a blanket and a strap by which it could be fastened on Jim's back. This took

the place of a saddle, and it was Bob's idea to have the horse trappings thus ready for use when needed —the hollow tree being a safe place of concealment.

In due season, as he walked along, Bob neared the pasture. He was accosted now and again by acquaintances, young and old, who spoke or nodded to him, and Lew Norris, a would-be wit, seeing the halter, remarked:

"Ah, Bob, I see you're going riding."

"Nope," was the answer. "I'm going up in my aeroplane, and this is to tie it to a cloud."

"Huh! Think you're smart," sneered Lew, as he slunk away when Bob laughed.

The young detective vaulted the fence surrounding the pasture where Jim cropped the green grass, and walked toward the old horse, who was at the far end. At first Bob had an idea he could sneak up to the steed from behind, and slip the halter over his head before Jim was aware of what was going on.

"For if I don't do that he may take it into his mind to cut up, and give me a run," thought Bob.

But Jim was smarter than he looked, and also more alert, though a casual inspection would not have impressed you with his abilities in that line.

But Bob was several hundred feet distant when the horse suddenly raised his head and swung around to face the approaching lad. He had, in some way, sensed the nearness of the boy, or had heard the thud of Bob's feet on the sod.

"Now don't go to cutting up and trying any of your tricks," warned the lad with a laugh. "You're too old for such stuff. It doesn't look nice on your part. And you aren't in the movies, you know. Come here and let me tie your bonnet strings."

Bob held the halter behind him, for Jim was wise and suspicious at times. And, as an attraction, Bob held out the salt he had. Jim raised his head farther, stretched out his long neck and quivered his red nostrils. He seemed eager and even anxious to get the salt, but he as much as said:

"I'm not taking any chances with you, young man. I know what you have in that hand behind your back."

"Well, if the horse won't come to me, I'll have to go to the horse," chuckled Bob, remembering Mohammed's famous decision. But this was something else again, as Sol Levy might say.

No sooner did Bob advance, holding out and temptingly shaking the salt, than, with a whinny, Jim whirled about and raced away.

"Um!" grunted Bob. "You're lively this morning for an old nag. But I'll get you!"

He started not after the horse, but in an exactly opposite direction. And though this might seem strange on Bob's part, he knew what he was doing.

Old Jim, like most animals, was very curious. If a thing puzzled him he liked to see what it was.

And more than once Bob had caught him by just this trick.

Instead of running after the flying steed, which act would only make him go faster, to the disadvantage of Bob, the lad used strategy. By pretending indifference, and walking away, he could provoke the curiosity of Jim, and make the animal turn and approach.

Bob had discovered this by accident one day, after a long and vain chase after the animal. He had given up, and was going back to report to his uncle that Flyaway couldn't be caught. But no sooner had Bob reached the fence, in his retreat, than he found Jim following, and the animal was easily caught by a quick motion.

"I'll try that way now," thought Bob.

He paid no further attention to Jim who, doubtless, in his own horse-like way, was laughing at the lad's seeming discomfiture. On reaching the fence Bob took off his cap, placed it on a post and into it poured the salt from the bag. Then, to make the location of the cap more conspicuous, Bob stuck in a crack of the post a tall, green weed that waved in the wind.

"If that doesn't bring him up on the run, I'm mistaken," mused the lad, as he hid himself near the salt-post, lying down in the tall grass, and waited.

He did not have long to wait. Just as he expected, as soon as Jim found he wasn't being pur-

sued, the horse turned and looked back. He saw nothing of Bob, but there was something on the fence post that needed to be investigated. What was that tall, flapping green thing? It must be looked after.

Accordingly Jim turned and walked slowly back, stopping now and then to whinny and sniff the air. But the object on the post did not move, and there was no sign of Bob.

But, hidden in the weeds, the alert Bob waited until Jim was near enough before jumping up.

"As soon as he starts on the salt I'll have him," Bob thought. "He's got a rope around his neck, too. That's good. I can grab that before I slip the halter on."

Jim came on, almost to the post, and then stopped. It would not do to advance too boldly. That wasn't the way the game was played. But the queer, waving weed attracted him, and then, too, there was the delicious odor of salt—not perceptible to Bob, but keen in the nostrils of the horse.

Throwing all caution to the winds, Jim now advanced boldly. His nose had not led him wrongly. It was salt—plenty of it. The next instant he was thrusting his velvet muzzle into the cap and licking up the saline particles.

Bob waited until the horse was absorbed in the feast and then, almost from beneath his forelegs, arose and grasped the rope halter about the neck of the steed.

But the young detective had reckoned without counting on Jim's excess of spirits that morning. The horse must have slept well and awakened greatly refreshed and ready for anything. For, no sooner did he sense the uprising of Bob, and feel the grip on the rope, than, with a neigh, the animal raised his head and swung about.

Bob, however, kept a tight hold, and, as a result, he was swung about when Jim swerved, and the lad's head hit the fence post with a resounding whack.

"Oh!" cried Bob as a pain shot through him. And then all seemed to become black, while there was a strange roaring in his ears. For ages, it seemed, Bob appeared to be tossing about on a raging ocean in the midst of a great storm.

Then, suddenly, there was peace and calm, and a voice, which seemed to come from the other side of the moon, was asking:

"Are you all right now?"

It took Bob some time to realize what it all meant —to sense what had happened. Then with a rush, that made his head ache, it all came back to him— his trick in catching Jim and striking his head on the post when the horse swung him about.

Through a sort of haze the young detective was aware that Jim was tied to the fence, calmly licking up what remained of the salt. And, bending over

the lad, was the bald-headed Punch and Judy man.

"Oh—you!" murmured Bob.

"Turn about is fair play," was the smiling answer. "I heard you helped me the other night—when I slipped at the spring, and now I can help you. I happened to be passing along the road and I saw what happened. Are you hurt?"

Bob wasn't quite sure of this point himself, but when he arose and moved about he answered in the negative. Beyond a crack on the head, which "sent him down for the count," as he related afterward, there was nothing wrong.

"I caught your horse and tied him," went on Mr. Purdy. "Are you sure you're all right?"

"Oh, sure," was the answer. Bob was feeling more fit every minute.

"Drink this," said Mr. Purdy, and held out a tin cup of water. "I got it at the spring over there," and he pointed to one in the corner of the pasture.

"Thanks," said Bob. The water cleared his brain and he felt no ill effects of the blow on his head, proving it by getting on Jim's back.

"Are you sure you can ride?" asked Mr. Purdy.

"Oh, sure, thank you. And are you all right again?"

"Quite—thanks to you, the young lady and the doctor. I'm traveling on. Made about all I can in your town, I reckon. Now if you can't manage to ride that horse back——"

"Oh, I'm all right now," insisted Bob with a laugh, and he really was. He rode Jim to the pasture bars, waving a farewell to Mr. Purdy, who was soon pushing his cart down the highway.

"It's sort of funny—meeting him so often," said Bob to himself as he rode along. "I wonder if he has anything to do with the golden eagle? Yet how could he?"

Bob did not know exactly how to answer his own question, so he didn't try. Instead he addressed himself to Jim, saying:

"You try any more tricks like that on me, old hoss, and you won't get any sugar nor salt either, for a month of Sundays."

Jim appeared to have gotten all over his trickiness, for he ambled along dejectedly, and was soon being shod in the smithy, Bob arranging for the smith's helper to deliver the horse to his uncle later in the day. For Bob had some plans of his own.

Meanwhile Ned and Harry had gone fishing, and, in spite of what Bob had said about the wind being wrong, they had had good luck.

"Well, I guess we got enough," said Harry, as he pulled out a specially large one.

"Yep," assented his chum. They were on their way home when they met Tad Bundy. This lad, dirty as to face and ragged as to clothes, seemed somewhat excited as he met the two fishing lads.

"I bin lookin' for youse," he gasped, his talk

being almost as careless as his appearance. "I was down to yer house but youse wasn't home."

"Well, what's the big idea?" asked Ned, easily. "Why do you want us?"

"This is from Bob Dexter," went on the ragged lad. "I was to give it to either of youse."

He handed Ned, as he spoke, a dirty piece of paper, which, when Harry's chum had read it he exclaimed in a strange voice:

"He wants us to come to the old mill!"

"The old mill? Is Bob there?" exclaimed Harry. "Let's see that note!"

Ned passed it over. It contained only a few words:

"I'm at the old mill. Come as soon as you can."

"Wonder if he's in trouble?" cried Ned.

"Say, what does this mean, Tad?" demanded Harry, with quick suspicion. "Where was Bob when he gave you this note?"

"In the old mill. Anyhow I guess he was in there, but I didn't see him."

"Then how'd you get the note?" Ned wanted to know.

"He chucked it to me outer th' winder. I was goin' by an' somebody hollered. They asked me if I knowed youse two, an' I said I did. Then he said take 'em this note and I said I would and he chucked it outer th' winder an' I picked it up an' it had Bob's name on it. That's all I know."

"It's got Bob's name on all right," agreed Ned. "Say, it must be—something about—the golden eagle," and he whispered the last words in his chum's ear.

"I guess so," assented Harry. "All right—we'll go there," he told Tad. "We'll leave our fish home and go there in the old flivver."

"I'll take your fish home for you," offered Tad.

"No, thanks. Got to get out the old rattler, anyhow," said Harry, who owned a nondescript car variously called a tin Lizzie and a flivver.

"Besides, Tad might forget to leave the fish," remarked Ned to Harry, as the ragged lad, having delivered the note, hastened away. And could they have seen the sly grin on Tad's face as, later, he met Martin Sill, the two chums would have had more reason than before for not trusting the smaller lad.

"That's what it is all right," said Ned to Harry when, having left the fish, they were rattling over the road in the direction of the old mill. "Bob's got some trace of the golden eagle and he wants help."

"And, naturally, he sends for us—ahem!" coughed Harry, with an assumed air of importance.

"Sure," laughed Ned.

The old mill was just what its name indicated—the abandoned building of what had once been an important industry in Cliffside. But electricity had

replaced water power, and with the selling of farms for building lots there was no more grist to grind—so the old mill was abandoned. The building still stood, however, and often there were crowds of merry young people attracted to it, for it was picturesque, and a good place for a picnic.

Leaving the car outside, there being no danger of it running away, Ned and Harry entered the ramshackle old building.

Nor did they do this without exercising some caution. For their association with Bob Dexter had taught them this. They were not, and never would be, detectives, not having a natural "bent" that way. And often they had poked fun at their chum for some of the things he did—the excessive caution he used, often when there seemed to be no need for it.

But now some of these things recurred to the minds of Ned and Harry, and they did not rush into the old mill. Rather they stood looking about them before crossing the threshold of the old door.

Then, seeing nothing to arouse their suspicions, and hearing nothing, they penetrated farther into the depths of the structure. Then the same thought came to them both at the same time. They wanted to let their chum know they had arrived.

"Hello, Bob!" they called.

Echoes were their only answer at first, and sensing

the silence, the lads began to suspect that a joke had been played on them.

"Bob! Bob!" they called again.

"All right—up here! Come on up!" called a muffled voice a moment later.

"He's up there!" exclaimed Harry, pointing to the stairs.

There was an upper story to the mill, formerly used for storing grains. Rather uncertain and rickety stairs led to it, and up these Ned and Harry now made their way, following, as they believed, the sound of Bob's voice.

"Maybe he's found the golden eagle and the stolen cups hidden up there," ventured Ned.

"Maybe," assented Harry.

At the top of the stairs was a room. The door stood open, and, thinking they heard a sound in there, as though their chum were waiting for them, Ned and Harry hurried in.

"Bob! Bob!" they cried.

The next instant they heard a crash behind them —heard the sound of a closing door, and then a mocking laugh. An instant later it seemed as if the old mill was falling apart.

"We're caught!" gasped Ned, turning back.

But he was too late. The door by which they had entered was closed.

CHAPTER XIV

BOB SHADOWS

FOR a few moments, following the crash and the realization that they were prisoners in a small room of the old mill, Ned and Harry did nothing but stand and look at each other—that is after Ned had made an ineffectual effort to open the door that had slammed shut after them. They were stunned by what had happened.

Then, after the first shock, they each became aware of two independent thoughts—that is each one had two thoughts of the same tenor.

"Is this a joke?" demanded Ned.

"If it is it's the first one of its kind Bob Dexter ever played, but I don't believe it is. This is serious and he may be in trouble," said Harry.

Such were their thoughts—not so much of themselves as of their talented chum.

"Where's that note?" asked Ned, referring to the scribbled bit of paper Tad Bundy had delivered to them.

"Here," replied Harry, taking the crumpled scrap from his pocket.

"I don't believe Bob ever wrote this," ventured Ned.

"Maybe not," assented his chum, looking at the writing in the dim light that came through a small window. "I reckon we don't either of us know enough of Bob's writing to tell whether or not he did this."

"That's so," admitted Ned. "Well, it's too late to think about that now. If we'd had our wits about us we'd have been suspicious from the start of anything Tad Bundy had a hand in."

"You got something off your chest that time!" complimented Harry. "And if Martin Sill didn't have a hand in this I'll never eat another piece of pie!"

"Just what happened, I wonder?" asked the other. "It sounded as if the old mill was falling down."

"I think it was those rickety stairs we climbed up to get in here," suggested Harry. "They were almost going down as we came up them. And the noise sounded right outside this room."

"So did that laugh!" exclaimed Ned. "And if that wasn't Martin I don't know his giggle when I hear it."

"Sure it was Martin!" assented the curly haired lad. "But what's his game? Why did he forge a note with Bob's name, get Tad to deliver it to us and then lock us in here? Does it have anything to

do with the club house mystery and the taking of the golden eagle?"

"Shouldn't wonder," agreed Ned. "But are we locked in? Maybe the door is only caught. I don't see how there'd be any lock left on this old shack. It must be over a hundred years old."

"It is, I guess," said Harry. "But we're shut in all right. The door holds as solidly as iron. They must have it fastened from the outside by a brace, or something, for the lock's gone—look."

He pointed to where an old-fashioned lock had once made the ancient portal secure, but there remained but little of this lock now. However the door itself was of stout oak, and from the way in which it resisted any attempt to push it open, it was plain that some sort of a brace—perhaps a strong wooden bar—had been fastened outside.

"They got us good and proper!" said Ned, grimly.

"Who?"

"Oh, Martin and Tad, of course. It's one of their jokes."

"I'll joke them when I get out!" threatened Harry. "Let's take a look from the window. Maybe we can crawl out that way."

But one look from the casement, after they had succeeded with some effort in opening the dusty sash, showed them that it was too far above the ground to risk emerging that way. There was a long drop, and not so much as a clinging vine or a rain pipe

with which they might aid their descent. The rain pipes had, long ago, rusted from the old mill.

"This is a funny sort of stunt!" complained Ned, somewhat bitterly. "Even if we could get this door open, we couldn't get down if the stairs have fallen away—and I'm pretty sure that's what the crash was we heard."

"Very likely," agreed his companion. "Though there'd be some part of them there, and we could crawl down them—a good deal easier than we could jump out of this window."

"If there's any jumping to be done you can do it," conceded the other with a laugh. "But let's have another try at the door." It held, however, against their combined efforts.

They looked about them. They were held prisoners in a small room at the head of the old mill stairs. It was a small room, and aside from the window and door had no other visible means of exit or admittance.

"It's queer they'd build just this one small room at the head of the stairs," commented Ned. "What could they have used it for?"

"Maybe it was where the old miller kept his money," suggested his chum. "There's another stairs at the other end of the mill, and they lead up to the other parts of the second story, where they used to store the grain."

"Then that's what this was—the old miller's

strong room," decided Ned. "And it's too strong for us. Listen!" he suddenly exclaimed.

They turned their ears toward the open window. From outside came that mocking laugh again, and some words were being shouted at them. They both peered out.

Down below, dancing in glee, was Martin Sill, and with him was Tad Bundy. Both lads were grinning at the success of their plot.

"Come up here and open this door, Martin, or I'll knock your head into the middle of next week!" threatened Harry, and he had more than once inflicted personal chastisement on the bully.

"Can't get up—the stairs are busted!" chuckled Martin.

"Well, unbar this door, and let us out, or you'll wish you'd never seen us!" threatened Ned.

"Ho! Ho! Don't you wish I would! Yah! Don't you wish you could get out!" mocked Martin. "Jump out the window if you're in a hurry," he grinningly suggested.

"We'll jump on you when we do get down!" declared Harry.

"Well, you can't get down right away—not until we let you!" chuckled Tad.

"What's the idea, anyhow? Why did you get us here, and what's all that nonsense about Bob?" cried Ned, hating to parley with the fat pest, but feeling that it would be wise to do so.

"The idea is that I'm getting even with you two for upsetting me—that's what the idea is!" angrily cried Martin, shaking his fist at the two captives in the upper regions of the old mill. "I told you I'd fix you and I have! Now you can stay there for a while!"

And before the two prisoners could say anything in answer Martin and his crony leaped into the waiting flivver and dashed off through the woods which bordered the site of the old mill and its slimy and weed-infested pond.

"Well, what do you know about that?" remarked Ned grimly, when it was certain that Martin and Tad had gone, leaving them shut in.

"I don't know what to think about it," confessed Harry. "It isn't going to be any fun to have to stay here all night."

"Stay here all night?" cried his chum. "I don't intend to do that! You've got a knife—so have I. We can cut a hole in this door, I guess and take away the bar, or whatever it is that's holding it. Come on—we've got to cut our way out! Then we'll trail Martin and our auto."

And while the two captives were preparing to do this, in another part of the woods Bob Dexter was working on another link in the chain of circumstances having to do with the solving of the club house mystery and the taking away of the golden eagle mascot.

Though the young detective was bitterly disappointed at the result of his excursion to the home of the strange Mr. Korth, the lad had not lost hope. He had said nothing to any of his friends as to what had happened. But he had started out on some new leads. In spite of the fact that the investigations of the police and the private detective had revealed nothing of moment to connect the Pastime Pleasure Club with the looting of the Athletic organization, Bob still had a sort of suspicion, in the back of his brain, that at least some members of the rougher club might know something of what had happened at the cozy recreational home of Bob and his chums.

"I didn't find out what I hoped I would the time of the fire," mused the lad, recalling the strange blaze which really burned nothing, and had such a peculiar smell of Fourth of July. "But I can't help thinking these fellows know something about it. I wonder if I could sneak around there now? I'm going to take a chance. And if I don't find out anything, I'm going to tell Mr. Sanbarth everything that happened in Korth's house. He has, or he had, our golden eagle, I'm sure. But I don't want to make an accusation that I can't prove."

It was this, more than a fear of being laughed at for what had happened to him, that held Bob back from telling the police of his experience.

With this in mind, Bob changed his plans, and,

instead of going back to Atwell, as he had intended when he refused the fishing invitation of Harry and Ned, the young sleuth struck off into the woods and along a path that led to the rather disreputable club house of the Pastime organization.

Bob proceeded through the woods cautiously, taking little-frequented paths that he had discovered in his wanderings, for he did not want to be seen and ordered away from the place by the sneering Sam Watson or Jake Johnson.

And it was when he was within a quarter of a mile of the object of his visit that Bob heard, in the woods off to his left, the unmistakable sounds of some one making their way through the tangle.

"Maybe it's a dog, and maybe——" but that is as far as Bob reached in his mental talk to himself. For, an instant later he had a glimpse of a man making his way through the woods.

"It's Herman Korth—the man of the golden eagle!" the lad almost exclaimed aloud. "What's he doing back here, and on the path that leads to the Pastime Club? What's his game? I'm going to shadow him! Maybe now, I can find out something!"

And, with all the skill of which he was capable, Bob Dexter proceeded to follow, like a veritable shadow, the strange hunter, who, however, did not have his gun with him this time.

CHAPTER XV

STRANGE TALK

"How's it coming over your way, Ned?"

"Not so very good! I never saw a door as hard as this! It's like iron!"

"You said something! But we can't give up. I figure that I'm about half way through. Soon as we get two holes in we can kick out a piece of the wood and reach through so we can knock away the bar that's holding us in—maybe."

"You well said it—*maybe*," commented Ned, grimly. "Maybe, after all our cutting, we won't be any better off when we've got two holes in the door."

"Well, we can see what's holding it shut, anyhow, and that's more than we can do now. It isn't the lock—that's sure."

"No, it isn't the lock."

To return to the captives for a time, both lads were agreed on this point—the lock was not holding them prisoners. By pushing and shoving on the door—not that they caused it to move more than a fraction of an inch—they had determined that it was

a bar across the middle of the portal that was holding it in place.

"And if we cut holes near there, and knock out a piece of wood, maybe we can move the bar," Harry had said.

So the lads had fallen to work with their heavy knives, and right glad they were that they had these implements with them, and that in each one was a big, stout blade, sharpened to a keen edge and point. It was with the point, more than with the edge, that the cutting was being done.

Chip after chip and sliver after sliver was cut away from the stout oak. The boys worked a little way separated, and their plan was to cut square holes, about three inches each way, in measurement, the holes being about two and a half feet separated, and near the middle of the door. Once the holes were cut through, the captives had two objects in mind.

One was to look out and see what it was that held the portal so firmly. The other was to kick, or force out, the piece of wood between the two holes. First they would score, or cut, a groove along the upper and lower edges, and when the wood was weakened enough, it could be forced out.

The opening thus made would enable them, they thought, to thrust out their hands and remove the bar which they imagined Tad and Martin had

slipped into place, once the captives were in the small room.

"Though how they sneaked up and slipped that bar in, and then got down without the stairs collapsing with them, is more than I can figure out," remarked Harry.

"Maybe they had the bar all ready to let it fall into place, and it did it of itself," suggested Ned.

"More likely they stood off a ways and pulled a string," was Harry's idea. And later this proved to have been the case.

"Whew! This is hard work!" murmured Ned, after several minutes of cutting, chipping and hewing away at the old and dried oak with his knife.

"An ice cream soda wouldn't go so badly now; would it?" asked his chum.

"Say, do you want me to hit you?" indignantly demanded the other. "Talking of ice cream sodas when my mouth's as dry as a lime kiln! I'd be glad even of a drink of water from the mill pond!"

"Same here—to say nothing of Old Marietta's spring," said Ned with a sigh. "But we got to keep on. Though what I won't do to that sneak Martin, and his crony Tad, when I get out of here won't be worth doing!"

"We sure will have to tan him good and proper," agreed his companion. "But you got to give him credit for putting one over on us."

"Oh, he put it over all right!" and Ned could

not help chuckling grimly. "We were fools to be taken in so easily."

"If it hadn't been for all the queer things that have happened—the taking of the golden eagle and the smashing of our trophies—I wouldn't have taken any stock in that scribbled note," admitted Harry. "But I thought Bob needed help in his detective work."

"So'd I. Well, let's get busy. No fun staying here."

"I should say not—soon be dark," agreed the other.

Once more they fell to with a will, using their knives with a skill acquired of long practice. Though their hands and arms ached from the strain of cutting such hard wood, and for so long a time, they kept at work, only resting occasionally.

Ned and Harry had been cutting away for perhaps two hours now. The afternoon shadows, as they could see through the small window, were lengthening. They still had nearly an hour's work on the wood of the door before they could hope to have the holes cut in. Then would follow the attempt to break out an oblong piece of the portal.

But there was uncertainty as to what their next move would be. Had they cut the opening in such a place that they could reach and remove the bar? Or was all their labor to be in vain?

They must proceed to the end before these questions could be answered.

Suddenly Ned paused and uttered an exclamation.

"Cut yourself?" asked Harry, solicitously. "I gave myself a dig a while back."

"No, I didn't cut myself," spoke Ned. "But listen—don't you hear voices?"

Harry also ceased his hacking at the door and inclined his head on one side.

"Yes, I hear some one coming, but I don't hear any talking," he remarked.

"If it's those fellows coming back, let's lay low and not let them see or hear us," proposed his chum. "Crouch down near the floor. If they don't see us, or hear us, they won't know what's happened. They may think we've gotten out. And if they come up here to take a look——"

"How are they going to get up, with the stairs fallen away?" Harry asked.

"Well, if they do come up, and open the door, be ready to spring at 'em!" advised the other.

Then they crouched on the floor of the little room, tense and ready.

Had Bob Dexter known of the plight of his chums, doubtless he would have given up trying to shadow the mysterious Mr. Korth, letting him await some other time of being discovered, and the young detective would have come to the rescue of Ned

and Harry. But, not knowing anything of what was happening back at the lonely red mill, Bob was unable to render any help.

He was very anxious to see what object the strange hunter could have had in coming to the woods—in heading in the direction of the Pastime Pleasure Club.

"And I'm going to find out, if possible!" Bob grimly decided.

It was no easy matter to follow the hunter without being himself discovered. But Bob was careful and patient, and succeeded, finally, in shadowing his quarry to a point close to the Pastime shack.

Then, instead of boldly proceeding up to the place itself, the man paused, looked about him in the woods as if for some landmark object and, having caught sight of a peculiar and old stump, he went toward it.

"Maybe they said they'd meet him here," thought Bob. "Well, if they do I'll be glad of it. For I can hide around here better than I can near the club house."

He crouched down in the bushes, not far from the old stump where Mr. Korth had taken his seat, and there Bob waited. He did not have long to wait, showing that the hunter had timed himself well, for, presently, there was a noise in the woods as of some one approaching. A low but clear whistle sounded, and was answered by Mr. Korth.

"They've arranged to meet!" thought Bob.

And, a moment later, there sauntered along the path the shuffling forms, and not very prepossessing faces, of Sam Watson and Jake Johnson. Each was smoking a cigarette and puffing vigorously.

"Here I am, boys!" called Mr. Korth.

"On time," remarked Sam.

"And I hope you are ready to do as you agreed," went on the hunter. "You aren't afraid, are you?"

"No, not exactly afraid," said Jake. "But Old Hanson is an ugly customer when he's angry. I'd just as soon he wouldn't be home."

"He won't be at home!" declared Sam. "Didn't I tell you I sent Tad to get him away from his shack? We'll have the place to ourselves."

"I'm glad of that," commented Mr. Korth. "I don't want to get into any more trouble."

Bob listened with ever-increasing wonder. What did this strange talk mean? He knew, in a flash, of whom they were speaking—Old Hanson was a queer negro character, living in a lonely hut, half way up Chestnut Mountain. What did they want of him? Did Mr. Korth and the two bullies contemplate anything evil toward the old man with whom Bob was on friendly terms?

What did it mean—this planning of a sneaking visit to his lonely shack?

Bob resolved to find out.

CHAPTER XVI

HEMPEN BONDS

HIDING there in the bushes, not far from where the strange scientist (if really he was such) and the two evil-faced members of the Pastime Pleasure Club were having that strange talk, Bob went over in his mind several facts in connection with Old Hanson.

The aged colored man, believed by many to have been a slave in the South before the Civil War, was a curious character. How he lived no one exactly knew. Certainly it would not seem that the few odd bits of work he did, occasionally, in the village —such as cutting grass, making a garden and like that—could keep him in enough money to support him. And what other source of income had he?

"He doesn't need much to eat, and he has his bed and a roof over him," Bob's aunt had said, once when Old Hanson was under discussion.

"But what does he do in the winter when there aren't any gardens to make?" asked the boy.

"Maybe he has discovered the secret of trans-

muting iron into gold, same as Mrs. Rathburn accused me of to-day," chuckled Mr. Dexter.

"How was that?" asked the lad, scenting a story.

"Well, she came in to buy some iron nails, and when I told her how much they'd be, she sort of looked at me in a queer way and said I must have discovered the secret.

"First I thought she meant, Bob, the secret of the missing golden eagle that you've been working on. But then she couldn't have intended that, I was sure. So I asked her what secret she meant, and she said I must have discovered how to turn iron into gold, as I was charging so much for nails these days!"

"She was quite impertinent, I should say!" commented Aunt Hannah, a bit stiffly.

"Oh, gosh! She didn't mean any harm!" chuckled her husband. "And hardware is dreadful high just now—I don't know where the prices are going. People will stop buying if things don't come down pretty soon."

"Well, there's one good thing about your business, Uncle Joel," remarked Bob.

"What's that?" inquired Mr. Dexter with a twinkle of his eyes.

"Well, really, there are two good things," went on the lad. "Your hardware doesn't spoil for keeping, and it doesn't go out of fashion."

"Well, I guess you're right there," conceded the merchant.

Bob thought of this talk now, as he crouched in hiding, waiting for some other words that would lead to a solution of the mystery—another mystery in addition to the one at the club house. What did Herman Korth mean by sending these two disreputable lads to the hut of the old colored man?

Certainly Old Hanson could have nothing there worth stealing, Bob reasoned. Though he had never been admitted to the place, the young detective had had glimpses within, and his quick eyes, taking in most of the details of the shack, had sized up the contents thereof as not worth more than a few dollars.

That was another queer thing about Old Hanson. Friendly as Bob was with him—and it may be said that the lad was on better terms with the former slave than anyone else in Cliffside—with all this, Bob had to stop short on approaching the door.

"'Tain't no place fo' white folks t' go in," Old Hanson had said in half apology more than once, when Bob, out of curiosity, more than for any other reason, would have gone in.

Bob's acquaintance and friendship for the old negro started when the boy, in his younger days, had trapped a rabbit close to the town graveyard. Thoughtless Bob was skinning the poor bunny, thinking, in his ignorance, that he could sell the fur for a goodly sum (really it wasn't worth anything) and Old Hanson happened along.

"Where'd yo' all git that rabbit?" he asked.

"He lived in the graveyard—I trapped him," Bob had said.

"Would yo' let me hab de lef' hind foot?" begged Old Hanson.

"What for?" laughed Bob.

"'Case as how de lef' hind foot ob a graveyard rabbit brings de bestes' luck yit!" was the answer.

And, caring nothing for the charm himself, Bob had given it to the old man.

"I wonder if he has it yet?" mused Bob as he saw Korth and the two bullies walking on through the woods, having completed a low-voiced conversation. "If he has, he may need it to bring him luck now. No telling what these folks are up to."

Bob trailed along, of course keeping out of sight and hearing of the trio. They were heading toward the negro's cabin on Chestnut Mountain—he was sure of that. But what their object was he must find out.

"If they intend any harm I'll take a hand in it," thought Bob.

Old Hanson had somewhat the same reputation as did Old Marietta Bobb—that of being a "witch," only, in the case of the negro, he was called a "voodoo man," and Bob's boyish tale of the rabbit's foot added to the reputation Hanson had.

"I wonder if Korth thinks he can get Hanson to go into a trance, or something like that, and tell

where there's another golden eagle?" mused Bob. "I wonder why he wants an eagle, anyhow? I've got to get ours back from him, and if I don't, pretty soon, I'll go to the police. But first I must see what they're going to do to Hanson."

The trail to the lonely cabin was about three miles long, up the steeper side of the mountain. Bob followed the trio, as best he could, hiding when there was danger of being discovered. That is, he thought he was following a trio until, when he emerged into an open place, he saw ahead of him only two—Sam and Jake.

"What's become of Korth?" thought the young detective. "I wonder if he has dropped out and is following me? That would be a joke—on me!"

Realizing that this might well be the case, Bob decided to wait a while before going on. He would remain where he was and wait. If Korth was following, the man would show himself, sooner or later, on the trail behind our hero.

"I may lose Sam and Jake, and they may get to Hanson's shack ahead of me, but I'll have to chance that," thought Bob.

However, after remaining in quiet seclusion for about ten minutes, and failing to see anyone coming cautiously up the trail after him, Bob decided that Korth was not following.

"He must have dropped out to let these fellows do the job themselves—whatever it is," thought the

lad. "No good, I'm sure of that. Sam and Jake aren't that kind. Well, now I'm going on to Hanson's place."

He hurried on, taking such precautions as he thought he must, and, somewhat to his surprise, he did not again catch sight of Sam and Jake. They seemed to have disappeared as completely as had Korth.

And Bob went all the way to the site of the lonely cabin without catching a glimpse of those whom he was shadowing. He paused as he neared the edge of the clearing where Old Hanson lived in a slab-sided hut.

All was quiet about the place. The doors and windows were closed, but this was often the case, even on a hot day, and Bob had found the old slave to be at home. He seemed to have a dislike of fresh air.

"Guess I'm here first, or else they're inside and are having a Quaker meeting," grimly mused Bob, as the silence continued. "I'll have a look."

Turning and making an observation, to be sure he was not observed, Bob cautiously approached the cabin. Instead of going to the front door, however, he went around to the back. He could not recall having approached this entrance before, and he was not surprised to find it almost overgrown with weeds. Indeed there was scarcely a semblance of a path, and Bob had to force his way through rank vegeta-

tion, which emitted a dank and almost overpowering odor.

"I wouldn't like to live here," mused Bob.

He was about to knock on the door, and was trying to picture Old Hanson tottering to open it, when there was a sudden rush behind the lad.

Before he had time to turn he was grasped in strong arms. A rough and dirty hand was clapped over his mouth and another blinded his eyes.

Bob's breath was almost driven from his body by the sudden impact, but, startled as he was, he realized that he had been attacked by at least two persons, and he could form a pretty good guess as to who they were.

"Hand me the ropes!" came a grunting command.

And before he could summon his strength to fight off the attack, supposing that he had had an even chance, Bob found himself held in hempen bonds, as strong cords were wound about his feet, legs, arms and body.

All this while one hand was over his eyes and another over his mouth, so he could neither see his assailants nor call for help. And, within a few seconds of the attack, Bob was a helpless and bound prisoner.

CHAPTER XVII

STUMPY TO THE RESCUE

THOUGH some miles apart, Bob Dexter and his two chums, Harry and Ned, were in somewhat the same predicament—all were prisoners, though Ned and Harry were actively engaged in making a way out for themselves.

They had stopped to rest, if you remember, in their hard work of cutting holes through the door of their prison room of the old mill, when the sound of voices was heard. At least the prisoners assumed that there were voices, though, as it transpired, it was only one.

"It doesn't sound like that skunk Martin," observed Ned, when they had remained as quiet as possible for several seconds, trying to locate, through the open window, where the voice came from.

"Nor yet his crony Tad," added Harry. "Yet who else would be coming around here?"

"Oh, lots of the fellows come around here—once in a while," went on Ned. "There's lots of catfish in the mill pond—if you like catfish."

"My dad says they're swell eating made into a

chowder," was Harry's comment. "But I never fished for 'em here. Though if any of our fellows come here I wish they'd show up now and get us out."

"Say, that's an idea—why didn't we holler?" asked Ned.

"Holler?" repeated his companion, wonderingly.

"Yes—shout—let somebody know we were shut up here by a couple of mean sneaks. If we'd hollered we might be out of here long ago."

"There aren't many people who come out here in the middle of the week," said Harry. "Saturdays there's picnics. But it wouldn't be a bad idea to shout. I guess maybe the reason we didn't do it is 'cause we didn't want to give Tad and Martin the satisfaction of knowing we wanted to get out."

"Maybe. But I'm going to yell now."

"Let's wait and see if we can hear those voices again."

They ceased talking and listened intently. A moment later they distinctly heard a voice say:

"What would you do, Bob?"

And, to their surprise, in a different tone, came back the answer:

"I'd sit down and think."

Ned and Harry looked wonderingly at each other, and their knives almost dropped from their hands in surprise.

"It's Bob!" they cried together.

"He's come to get us out!" added Harry.

"Bosh! He didn't know we were shut up here!" declared Ned. "But anyhow, he's here. Hi, Bob!" he yelled, sticking his head from the window. "Let us out! Those skunks, Tad and Martin shut us up in here! See if you can climb up and open the door. But look out—the old stairs have fallen away, I guess."

"Do you see him?" asked Harry, for the window was so small that there was room but for one lad's head at a time.

"No, I don't see him," Ned admitted. "But he must be there. He and some other lad."

"It didn't, somehow, sound like Bob's voice," Harry stated.

"That's 'cause we're shut up in here," was Ned's opinion. "But some one is coming out of the bushes. We're all right now."

A moment later a boy emerged from the underbrush surrounding the old mill, and, at the sight of him Ned uttered a cry and the name:

"Stumpy!"

"Is it Stumpy?" asked Harry.

"Sure it is! Hi, Stumpy! You and Bob come up here and let us out; will you?"

Stumpy, for he it was, looked up at the head of Ned Fuller thrust from the window. If Stumpy was surprised he gave no indication of it, though, some

time later he admitted that at first he didn't know but what he was dreaming.

"Come on up—you and Bob, and let us out!" begged Ned. "But look out for the broken stairs."

Not until then did Stumpy speak, and when he did it was one of his characteristic utterances. He said:

"No Bob."

He might have been an Indian, so sparing of words was he. But the two prisoners, fortunately, understood.

"Isn't Bob there with you?" cried Ned.

Stumpy merely shook his head. No need to waste his breath when a sign would answer.

"I heard you talking to Bob!" insisted Ned.

Again Stumpy shook his head.

Ned, with an impatient gesture, seemed to give up the solution of the riddle for the time being. After all there was something more important than that.

"Will you come up and let us out?" asked Ned.

This time Stumpy shook his head vertically instead of horizontally. It meant "yes." Harry, farther back in the room, could not, of course, see this.

"What's he saying?" he asked. "And how could he be talking to Bob if he isn't there? Has he got a wireless?"

"I give it up," remarked Ned. "You know

Stumpy. Talks about as much as a mud turtle. But he's coming up, I guess."

"That's good. Tell him to look out for the broken stairs."

Ned, who had drawn his head in from outside, again stuck it out and called:

"Oh, Stumpy! Look out for the broken stairs. They're so rotten they fell apart."

Stumpy was then inside the mill. And as no nods of his head could then be seen he was forced to use a vocal method of communicating. But he was as economical as ever of his words and merely grunted: "Um!"

"I guess he understands," said Ned with a laugh. "We'll soon be out of here, Harry."

"Can't be any too soon to suit me. I'm about starved!"

"Same here!"

The lads closed their knives and put them back in their pockets. Now that Stumpy had come to the rescue they did not need to cut their way out. They could hear the strange lad making his way up to them, and, though they could not see him—for they had not quite finished cutting holes in the door—they imagined he was mounting by means of the string piece of the stairs. This might still be fastened to the inner wall of the mill.

And such proved to be the case. For Stumpy, mounting in that manner, managed to reach the plat-

form in front of the door. The portal was securely fastened by a bar on the outside—a stout, wooden bar thrust into two iron supports.

And it was well that Stumpy had come, for when he threw open the door, and let out the prisoners, they saw that they never would have been able to have moved the bar through the holes they were cutting, since it was nearly two feet above where they had made their attack.

"Thanks, Stumpy!" exclaimed Ned with fervor, as he and his companion were released. "We're much obliged to you."

"And then some!" added Harry.

Stumpy grinned all over his freckled face and then suddenly became more serious.

"Listen!" he whispered, holding up his hand for silence.

CHAPTER XVIII

BOB'S ESCAPE

THOUGH a dirty rag, firmly bound over his eyes prevented him from seeing—the rag replacing the cigarette-odored hand that had first blinded him—and though his mouth was gagged with another rag, so that he could not call out, still the ears of Bob Dexter were wide open. Not that, like the hippopotamus, Bob could close his ears, as that river horse does when diving, but I mean that the young detective was straining every nerve connected with his hearing to catch every sound that might give him a clew as to who his assailants were, and inform him as to their object.

Regarding the latter he could pretty well guess. He was getting on suspicious ground, if not exactly that, on ground which the members of the Pastime Pleasure Club regarded as strictly their own.

And it may have been that they had a legal right to it—a right to keep intruders away. But this did not give them the right to so summarily take the law into their own hands as they had done.

That those who had attacked him were members

of the organization with the shady reputation, Bob did not for an instant doubt. And once he had smelled that peculiar cigarette odor on the hands of one of his captors, the lad was pretty certain in his own mind as to the identity of at least one of the bullies.

"Those are the doped cigarettes Jake Johnson smokes," thought Bob. There was a firm belief in the minds of many members of the Boys' Athletic Club that Jake and his particular chums smoked "doped" cigarettes—that is, paper rolls of tobacco impregnated with something like opium.

Now this may have been all nonsense. Really I don't know anything about it. I have heard of doped cigarettes, though I don't know that it is possible to put opium in them, and I don't see how it could improve one of the "smokes." Certainly some of the paper cigars have a very peculiar smell, and it was this sort of smell, on the hands of one of the attackers who roughly bound Bob with ropes, that gave the lad his clew.

After his first fierce struggle to escape, the lad "took it easy," as he said later. He realized the futility of trying to break loose from the strong hands that held him, and he wanted to save his energies for a better time. For he did not intend to remain a prisoner any longer than he could help.

"They've got me now—Jake Johnson and Sam Watson—that's sure," mused Bob. "But that

doesn't say they're going to keep me very long. I guess they wanted to get me out of the way while they went to Old Hanson's shack. But why are they going there—that's the question?"

Well might Bob ask himself this. And he followed it up with:

"And what's Korth's game—he and his talk about golden eagles? I guess that's only a blind! He's up to some other trick on Chestnut Mountain, and golden eagles is only a talk. But why did he have our club's mascot? That's what I'd like to know!"

Bob's musings were somewhat roughly interrupted when he found himself picked bodily up and carried along. Not that, at any stage in the recent proceedings, gentleness had been the watchword, for the attackers had been harsh from the start. Nor did they evince any particular care when they picked the young detective up and walked off with him.

Bound as he was, with his eyes covered and a sickening rag in his mouth, Bob's condition was anything but pleasant, and he could not relieve his feelings by telling the bullies what he thought of them.

Beyond that first utterance, when one requested the other to hand him the binding ropes, neither Sam nor Jake had spoken. Perhaps they hoped by keeping silent to have their identities remain undiscovered. But they did not know Bob Dexter.

The bound lad was carried some little distance and then laid down, none too gently, on what his senses

told him was a pile of old feed bags. He knew that odor well, for many a bag of feed he had opened to scatter the grains to Aunt Hannah's chickens.

And it did not take the deductive abilities of even an amateur detective to tell Bob that he had been carried inside some building and there laid down upon the pile of feed bags.

He heard his captors going out, he heard the door shut and locked, and the key turned in the lock. Then, faintly he heard the murmur of voices as the two bullies moved away. The murmur grew more and more faint as the captors increased their distance.

Bob's feet were tied together, his hands were in like condition, and were stretched behind his back, upon which he lay. His first act, after listening a while to make sure he was alone in the hut, shack or whatever it was, was to roll over on his face.

"I guess I'll be able to rub this bandage off my eyes, and then I can see what I'm doing," thought the captive detective. "There's nothing worse than trying to work in the dark."

But if Bob imagined he was going to get rid of the eye bandage easily, he was mistaken and disappointed. The dirty rag was firmly tied—so securely, in fact, that it was beginning to make the lad's eyes ache. But he persisted, and, rubbing his head up and down, and from side to side on the pile of bags upon which he laid, the lad, at last, succeeded

in sliding the bandage up. Once it had started it was comparatively easy to get it off the remainder of the distance, and with a sigh of relief Bob could look about him.

He found that he was a prisoner in some sort of little shanty. It had no windows—only a door—and that was closed. It was dark, hot and stuffy in the place, and the only light was that coming around the edges of the door.

"What in the world is this place, anyhow?" thought Bob. "It's too small for a chicken coop or even a wood-shed, and, anyhow, I don't know of any houses around here. Looks as if it was just made for a prison. But——"

And then, suddenly, a light of knowledge broke upon Bob.

"The dynamite shanty!" he exclaimed. "That's it!"

Not that the discovery caused him any fear of that powerful explosive. There was none in the place, he knew. Some time before a dam had been built across a part of Rockaway river.

The contractors had to use dynamite in blasting, and a town ordinance obliged them to keep the explosive in a red shanty off some distance in the woods. They were allowed to bring on the job only a small quantity of dynamite as it was needed.

And it was in this shanty, long since emptied of its dangerous contents, that Bob now found himself

a prisoner. He had forgotten that it was hidden in the woods, not far from the club house of the Pastime boys.

"Queer I didn't remember that," mused the lad. "Well, now that I know I'm here, the next thing is to get out."

He felt much more sanguine about escaping, now that he could see what he was doing. And when he had rid himself of the bandage over his eyes, his next care was to get the gag out of his mouth. That positively sickened him, for the rag seemed to have been used to wipe oil off a motor boat engine, perhaps. The Pastime members owned some nondescript power craft and they were always tinkering with them.

After some exertions, rolling about, moving his head to and fro over the pile of bags on the floor, working his shoulders, in succession up against the gag, Bob, at last, succeeded in making it slip. And, like the eye bandage, once it was started, the rest was comparatively easy.

"Whew! I feel better now!" thought the lad as he took a long breath. "When I get a chance at Sam and Jake I'll make them pay for this! They did it all right!"

But Bob was only half over his troubles. His feet and hands were still bound, and so tightly were the ropes pulled that he was in considerable pain.

His arms and legs were beginning to feel numb from the lack of circulation of his blood.

"Feels like they were going to sleep all over," was the way the young detective described it.

However, he was not going to end his efforts yet. He knew the dynamite shanty had been roughly constructed, and he reasoned that, somewhere among the boards, the ends of nails would be sticking out.

"If I can get up against one of those nails I can rub the ropes around my hands until I get them apart," he reasoned.

Hitching himself along, a few inches at a time, Bob felt, with his fingers, for a protruding nail. He had made a painful circuit of one side of the shack, and was half way around the other wall before he felt what he was after—a sharp nail, sticking out an inch or two from the wall board.

Locating the position of this as well as he could in the darkness, and his cramped attitude, Bob began to rub the rope around his hands up and down on the sharp point.

It was slow, tedious and painful work, but he kept at it, and, at last, after nearly two hours, succeeded in freeing himself. By that time his fingers and arms were so cramped and wearied that he had to lie down, with a sick and faint feeling in his stomach.

However, Bob was a healthy lad, and his latent energy soon made itself felt. He sat up, got out

his knife and soon severed the bonds on his feet. Then he stood up.

"Now to get out of here!" he exclaimed aloud, and the sound of his own voice was pleasing to him after the ominous silence.

He tried the door. As he had expected, it was securely locked from the outside.

"But maybe I can find something to force it," he reasoned. "They didn't make this shanty any too strong—it was only for temporary use."

It was darker in the place now, from which Bob reasoned that the afternoon was waning. He felt about, on the floor and in corners. And, just when he was about to give up, his fingers clutched what he knew was an iron crowbar. One of the workmen on the dam must have left it there.

"Now I'll have that door open!" exulted Bob.

With the powerful implement it was the work of but a moment to force the door off its hinges, and, a moment later Bob Dexter was outside, free—a prisoner no longer.

CHAPTER XIX

A STRANGE DISCOVERY

BOB DEXTER stood still for a few moments after having broken his way out of the old dynamite shack. Not so much that he wished to get his "bearings," as that he wanted to fill his lungs with fresh air, after his confinement. And, also, he wanted to think out a plan of action.

"Something's got to be done about this, and pretty quick, too!" he told himself. "Those sneaks aren't going to get away with kidnaping stuff like that."

Bob wasn't exactly kidnaped, but it amounted to much the same thing. He had, as he said later, "poked his nose in where it wasn't wanted," and he had to abide by the consequences. But he wasn't going to stand tamely by, nor sit supinely down and let himself be walked over, bundled up, bound, gagged and blindfolded as he had been without getting revenge. This he was determined upon.

A glance about him, after he had begun to feel more like himself following his egress from the shack, told him, what he had already guessed, that it was getting late in the afternoon.

"I'd better be getting back home—I didn't tell them I'd be away from supper," mused Bob. "Guess I'll have to let Old Hanson go for the time. Though I wish I could warn him, for I'm sure he's in some danger. That fellow Korth and those two sneaks aren't up to any good, going to the old man's cabin as they are."

Bob was in rather a quandary. He realized that he was up against heavy odds, and if he persisted in following Korth and the two husky members of the Pastime Club, he might be more roughly treated than he had been at first.

"I know what I'll do," declared Bob, half aloud. "I'll go to town and get Ned and Harry. They must be back from fishing by this time. I'll go get them to help me. Guess maybe I made a mistake trying to solve this whole mystery alone. I need some help. I don't have to let them in on all my secrets, but they can go up to Hanson's cabin and tell him to be on the lookout. He isn't as friendly with them as he is with me, but I'll have them tell him I sent them and it will be all right. I'll let Sam and Jake go for a while. I can fix them later!"

And, as he thought of the indignities to which he had been subjected by the two rival club members, Bob clenched his fists and shook one in the direction he imagined the boys to have gone.

"I'll go back by way of the old mill," decided Bob. "It's rougher but it's shorter."

And so fate, luck, or whatever you choose to call the chance which sometimes guides us, sent Bob back toward the scene of the captivity of his friends just about the time Stumpy was rescuing them.

For, as I have told you, Stumpy scrambled up what was left of the old stairs, like a monkey, and took the bar down from the door of the little strong room. And as the three lads—the two rescued ones and the rescuer—stood out on the platform, the freckled-faced youth heard a sound which caused him to exclaim:

"Listen!"

"What did you think you heard?" asked Ned.

For answer Stumpy extended his right hand and moved the first and second fingers, stiffly and alternately in the manner of some one walking, like the old German goose step.

"You mean some one coming?" asked Harry, not a little impressed by the way in which Stumpy saved his breath.

A nod of assent was the answer.

"If it's Tad and Martin coming back," fiercely muttered Ned, "we'll give them what's coming to them."

"Let's get down," suggested Harry, for now all three lads became aware, from the crackling of the underbrush and the snapping of twigs, that some one was approaching the old mill.

Enough of the string piece, and parts of the old,

rotten stairs remained so that it was comparatively easy, for the active lads, to get down to the first floor. The stairs had collapsed in a heap, of their own weight, it seemed, for a casual inspection showed how rotten the wood was.

"That's how they trapped us," remarked Ned, pointing to a long cord which ran from a point near the lower door to the cross bar that had held the door from opening outward. It was evident that after Tad and Martin had fooled Ned and Harry into entering the old mill, one of the conspirators had swung the door shut, or else had so arranged it that it swung shut of itself, and then the cord had been pulled from below.

Thus Ned and Harry had been trapped, to their no small chagrin, and they were eager for revenge. Thus when they heard some one approaching, and thought it might be the lads responsible for their plight, they were eager for an anticipated fray.

But as they looked toward the source of the noise, and knew, by the increase of it that whoever was causing it was near the mill, they were given a surprise.

For from the tangled underbrush stepped—not Martin and Tad, but Bob Dexter.

"Bob!" gasped Ned and Harry, together.

"Say, I was just coming to look for you fellows!" exclaimed the young detective, glancing sharply at

his chums, who had just emerged from the tumble-down old mill.

"And we were coming to see you," Ned explained.

"Come to get me—did you hear how I was tied up in the old dynamite shack?" quickly questioned Bob.

"The dynamite shack, no? How'd it happen?" cried Harry.

"Who did it?" Ned wanted to know.

Characteristically, Stumpy said never a word. He just listened to all that went on.

"Jake and Sam trussed me up," said Bob. "I just got loose. There's something queer going on about the golden eagle. I need you fellows to help me. Old Hanson's in danger, I think. But say, what's happened you? Look as if you'd been drawn through knot holes!"

Truly Ned and Harry seemed a bit fagged.

"You aren't any spring beauty yourself," commented Ned to the young sleuth. And, really, Bob wasn't, for his face was dirty and his clothing disarranged.

"We were shut up in a queer room of the old mill," explained Harry. "Tad and Martin got us here—said you sent a note—we thought you were in trouble. They pulled a bar across the door and the stairs fell down. We were cutting our way out when Stumpy came along and——"

"We thought you were with him!" broke in Ned.

"Weren't you talking to Bob, Stumpy, just before you rescued us?" demanded the lad, remembering the two voices.

"Nope," was Stumpy's reply.

"You were talking to some one!" insisted Harry. "We heard you."

"Myself," sententiously answered the freckled lad.

And then Ned and Harry understood, though later Bob explained it to them. It seems Stumpy had been out in the woods tracking a ground hog, wishing to find where it had its burrow. And Stumpy was trying to follow the animal by means of clews such as Bob used in his amateur detective work. To make the matter clear in his own mind, Stumpy was in the habit of asking questions of himself, pretending that Bob was with him. And he would answer them as he thought Bob might answer them. It was this self-conducted conversation that Ned and Harry had heard, thinking it was the talk of Stumpy and Bob. But it was Stumpy alone.

The mill captives quickly related what had happened to them, and in speculating about it they and Bob came to the conclusion that Tad and Martin had acted as they did merely in a joking way.

"Martin was sore at us for upsetting him that time," explained Ned, "and he got Tad to help him get square. But we owe him something on account."

"And I owe Jake and Sam a lot more!" declared Bob. "Are you fellows with me? I need help. Guess I've played a lone hand long enough. I don't seem to be getting anywhere. Will you help?"

"Sure!" cried Ned and Harry. Stumpy only grunted, but it meant the same thing.

"Then I'll tell you something," went on Bob, and he related the strange events of the night he went to the lonely house in Atwell, when the golden eagle was forcibly taken from him.

"But if he's got our mascot why not tell the police and let them get it back for us?" asked Ned.

"No! No!" quickly said Bob. "Let's do this ourselves. What's the use letting the police have all the glory and the reward, too? We can get it—we'll all whack up on the money."

"If we can find the golden eagle," said Harry.

"Oh, we'll find it!" declared Bob, confidently. "Now here's what you fellows better do. Go on to Old Hanson's cabin, and see what happens there. I've got to let my uncle and aunt know I may be late for supper—maybe I won't go home at all, but I got to get word to them."

"Why don't you telephone from Hick's place?" asked Ned, referring to a little store, not far from the old mill.

"I could do that—yes," agreed Bob. "You wait for me here. I'll skip down and telephone and be

right back. Then we'll go to Old Hanson's shack together. It'll be better that way."

"Are you all right for another mix-up?" asked Harry, noting Bob's somewhat disheveled condition.

"Oh, sure, I'm all right now. I was just a bit ruffled up; that's all. Wait for me here."

Bob returned in much quicker time than his chums had thought it possible for him to make. He carried several bundles.

"Say, what do you think we're going to do—camp out here for a week?" chuckled Harry.

"Or maybe he thought we'd have company," added Ned.

"No, but there's no use making two bites at a cherry," answered Bob. "Thought I might as well get enough while I was at it."

"I'll say you did," remarked Harry, as the bundles were opened.

They proved to contain crackers, cheese, dried, boneless herrings in glass jars, and when one of these was opened Ned uttered an exclamation of delight.

"If that doesn't give you an appetite nothing will!" he cried as he held out the herring jar.

"Don't hog 'em all," begged Harry. "I got some rights, you know!"

"Oh, you'll get 'em—don't worry," was the rejoinder. "And molasses cookies, too, Bob," he went on, opening another package.

"Why not?" asked the young sleuth. "I'm hungry—don't know about you fellows—but I sure can eat."

"And all the honors aren't going to you," commented Harry. "I'm some little eater myself when I get the chance."

"I'll say you are," laughed Bob. "I had him to supper at my house once," he confided to Ned, "and when he went home my aunt asked me if Harry was always like that."

"She did not!" cried the one in question.

"Hope to die if she didn't! She said she never saw anybody eat like you did in all her born days."

"She ought to watch you," said Harry, giving Bob a poke in the ribs.

"Don't do that!" cried the young detective. "You'll put me on the blink so I can't eat a thing."

"All the more for us then," chuckled Ned. "But — my eye — look — marshmallow cakes. Oh, crackie!"

"You sure did spread yourself," commented Harry. "But say—with crackers and cheese and herring—we're going to be as thirsty as goldfish in a dry summer," and he pretended to gasp for water.

"There's a spring back of the mill pond," remarked Bob.

"That's so," admitted Harry. "I forgot about that. I'd sure hate to drink the mill pond water—all green scum."

"Only duck weed—won't hurt you," said Ned.

"You can have my share," generously conceded Harry. "I'm not anxious to grow webbed feet. Well, let's start the party."

They spread the viands, which Bob had bought at the store, out on a flat stump, and they were eating away, with good appetites as you can well imagine, when Ned suddenly nudged Bob and whispered:

"Do you see what I see?"

"Where?" was the question.

"Right over there—by that sassafras bush. Look, Harry!"

Harry, who had been about to inhale a piece of "curdled milk," as he called the cheese, dropped it and stared at a white poodle dog attired in a red coat and blue trousers, who, with his head cocked on one side, was curiously observing the boys.

"Wake me up—I'm dreaming!" gasped Harry.

"Is it real?" asked Ned.

Just then the dog barked—pleasantly enough—and wagged his tail in friendly fashion.

"He's real, all right," asserted Bob.

"Try him on a herring," suggested Ned.

The dog advanced and nibbled at the dried fish.

"Must belong to a circus," suggested Bob, as they inspected the queerly-attired poodle. "I guess he does tricks."

"Try him," suggested Ned. "Stand up—give us your paw," he ordered. The dog did both, and the

boys laughed. They were beginning to wonder from what show the dog could have escaped, since none had been advertised in that vicinity, when there was a rustling in the bushes, followed by a voice calling:

"Here, Ponjo. Where are you? Ponjo!"

The dog barked sharply, and, a moment later there appeared on the scene Mr. Purdy—the Punch and Judy man.

"Oh—you boys here?" he exclaimed—in considerable surprise, Bob thought.

"Yes—we're here," said Ned. "That your dog?"

"Yes. Ponjo is mine." The manner in which the animal fawned on the bald-headed man would have been answer enough.

"You didn't always have him; did you?" asked the young detective. "I didn't see him before."

"I've had him quite a few years, but lately he was taken sick, and I had to send him to a vet's place. I just got him back yesterday. That's what brought me in this vicinity again."

"Oh," said Bob, who was beginning to wonder why the showman had reappeared after saying he had made all the money he could in the town.

"Yes, I didn't know just where I'd be traveling, so I had Ponjo sent here. He's a mighty fine dog—draws even better than my show. I'm glad to get him back. He wandered away when I stopped

beside the road for supper, and I was afraid he was lost. I'm glad he came here."

"Speaking of supper," began Bob, "will you have some of ours?"

"We have lots more than we need," added Harry.

"Thanks—but I've finished," was the answer. "You might give Ponjo a bit of herring, if you don't mind. He's very fond of it and I haven't any."

"Take some with you," offered Bob, when the dog had eaten all his master said was good for him.

"I will," accepted Mr. Purdy. "And now I think I'll take off your trappings, Ponjo, and let you get in the cart. We're traveling on," he added to the lads. "Going to show in Atwell to-morrow."

"Atwell?" questioned Bob, quickly.

"Atwell," answered Mr. Purdy, and with a wave of his hand he was gone, carrying the trick dog with him.

"Queer duck," commented Harry, when it was safe to do so.

"Nice dog," added Ned.

Bob said nothing, but as he took another drink, for the food had made him thirsty, he was doing some hard thinking. And the burden of it was:

"Why does that Punch and Judy man turn up so often when I'm working on this case? I'm beginning to get suspicious."

But of this he said nothing to his chums.

"Well, if we've had enough to eat, let's do some-

thing," suggested Ned. "No use lying around here all night."

"Right-o," exclaimed Harry. "I'm ready for a move."

"Then let's get to Old Hanson's cabin as soon as we can," suggested Bob. "No telling what those fellows might do."

As Bob had requested his aunt, to whom he telephoned, to let the parents of the other boys know they were with him, and might not return until after dark, there was no cause for worriment. On they went, the four of them, through the woods, toward the cabin of the old colored "voodoo" man, as many called him.

They paused, now and then, to listen for any sounds that might betoken the nearness of their enemies, but the woods were silent.

Suddenly Bob, who was in the lead, a place assigned to him without question, gave a sudden cry of surprise and warning.

"Look out!" he shouted.

A moment later he seemed to drop from sight down a hole in the ground. Ned and the others coming to a stop on the very brink of the excavation, concealed from sight until Bob stepped on the thin covering of leaves and earth, made a strange discovery.

CHAPTER XX

WRONG FEATHERS

"ARE you hurt, Bob?" cried Ned, as he, together with Stumpy and Harry, looked down on their chum in the hole. It was dark down there, but Harry had a flashlight, and Bob was easily seen in its powerful rays.

"No, I'm not hurt," the young detective answered after a moment of hesitation, during which he was probably taking stock of himself to see whether or not he had suffered any injuries in his fall.

"But what happened?" asked Harry. "How'd you come to get down there?"

"Not by choice, I'll tell you that!" answered Bob somewhat grimly, as he began to move about. He was pretty well shaken up.

"It's like a trap!" commented Ned.

"It is a trap!" asserted Harry.

Stumpy, as usual, was saying nothing. But his eyes were roving about the place.

"Yes, it does look like a trap—covering a hole with sticks, loose leaves and dirt so it doesn't show

until you step on it," said Bob. "But, all the same, it isn't a trap."

"What, then?" Ned wanted to know.

"It's a sort of tunnel, at least there's a tunnel leading from this hole. What I think it is, is a sort of back way out from the gambling shack of the Pastime Club."

"So they could get away in a hurry in case the police raided them?" asked Harry.

"That's it," declared Bob. "You notice this hole I fell into isn't straight up and down, like a well. It has a slope to it so the fellows could easily run up it when they came out of the tunnel."

He demonstrated this by quickly making his way up the earthen slope, littered by what remained of the loose covering of sticks, dried leaves and grass. So well concealed had been the slanting opening that Bob had not noticed it in the darkness that was fast falling.

"Say, this is a queer sort of thing," commented Ned.

"Nothing's queer that has to do with those Pastime fellows," declared Bob. "And if you fellows are game I think we can find out something that may be useful to us."

"You mean about the golden eagle?" questioned Harry.

"I won't go so far as to say that," spoke Bob, with a new sort of deliberateness. "But here's a

tunnel. We don't know where it leads to, but we can go along it and find out. I'm pretty sure it goes to the gambling shack. Shall we go on to the end and see?"

The spirit of adventure was strong in Ned and Harry. They had begun on a quest and were eager to carry on.

"Let's go on!" exclaimed Harry.

"Sure!" voiced Ned.

From the untalkative Stumpy came one word.

"Hanson," was all he said. But there was a question in his voice and Bob understood.

"That's so!" he exclaimed. "We ought to see what those bullies are going to do to the old colored man. And yet, now we're at this tunnel, we ought to follow it up."

"Couldn't we divide?" asked Ned. "There are four of us here. Two can go on through the tunnel, and two go to the cabin in the woods. We can get together later."

"Come on!" was what Stumpy said. It indicated he was willing to make the trip to Hanson's shack, and forego the possibility of solving the mystery of the tunnel.

As he started away from the sloping hole into which Bob had dropped, Harry remarked:

"I'll go with Stumpy."

"That's good," and Bob breathed a sigh of relief. "We'll split, and meet later. You two fellows

had better stay at Hanson's cabin. Ned and I'll come there as soon as we make sure where this tunnel goes. That won't take us long, and if you need help we'll be with you."

"All right," assented Harry. "Come on, Stumpy!"

The two lads started off through the fast-darkening woods, but as they had a flashlight with them, and as Bob had one in his pocket, they were as well provided for as the circumstances permitted.

Waiting until he had seen his chums well on their way, Bob turned to Ned and remarked:

"Now it's up to us to find out what this means."

"I'm with you," was the quick reply.

Using more care than Bob had exercised when he, unwittingly enough, stepped on the concealed excavation, the two lads scrambled down the slope. It was Ned's first view of the actual tunnel opening, and he looked at it in some wonder. It was only wide enough for one person to pass along at a time, and not quite high enough so they could walk upright. To proceed along one had to go in a stooping position.

"There was a lot of work to it for all that," said Ned, as he looked at the earthen sides, showing brown, with here and there a glimmering stone as Bob flashed his light.

"Yes," assented the young detective, "there was. But they probably took their time at it. Now let's

travel along. If I'm right this tunnel ought to end at the gambling shack."

This so-called "gambling shack," was, as I have said, a sort of smoking-room annex of the main building of the Pastime Pleasure Club. There was more than a well-defined rumor that card and other games of chance went on there, and stories had been told of hapless and foolish youths who had been parted from their money in the place.

However Ned and Bob were not so much concerned with these stories at this time, as they were in the possibility of connecting the tunnel with the small shack.

"Of course I may be wrong," admitted Bob as he led the way into the black and winding passage, "but I think it's part of the Pastime outfit."

"What else could it be?" Ned wanted to know.

"Well, some one might have started to dig a mine," said Bob.

"That's a joke!" chuckled Ned.

"We'll soon find out," remarked his chum. "But let's get a move on. We don't know what Stumpy and Harry may stack up against at Hanson's shack, and they may need help."

The tunnel showed signs of having been well constructed. It was braced with timbers and rough boards on the top and sides to prevent a cave-in. The floor, too, was well trodden down, as though many feet had passed along it.

"Suppose we meet some one," remarked Ned as he followed Bob and the latter's glimmering flashlight.

"Can't tell what to do until we see who it is," was the reply. "But keep still, and if we do meet anyone we may know it first."

Thereupon Ned relapsed into silence. The tunnel was several hundred feet long, and must have taken a number of boys a long time to dig it. But they could work at it day or night, and out of sight. Probably months were spent on it.

Suddenly Bob uttered a low hiss, as a warning to Ned to come to a halt, and the latter did, venturing a cautious whisper:

"What is it?"

"Don't know yet," was the low-voiced reply. "But there's something black just ahead. Looks like a door. Come along easy."

Advancing cautiously, Ned found that the tunnel unexpectedly widened, and he was able to stand at Bob's side. Then, in the gleam of the electric torch, the lads saw a closed door before them. It was the end of the tunnel. But to what did the door lead? That was the question.

Standing silent for a moment, they both listened attentively. Not a sound came to their ears. Bob put forth a hand and pushed on the door.

Somewhat to his own surprise, as well as Ned's, the portal opened, and Bob, discovering this, leaned

back, fearing an attack from some one who might be in the room to which the door gave entrance.

But no attack came—all was silent, and dark, save for the beam of light from the torch the young detective carried. This he flashed about and in an instant he and his chum had the information they wanted.

The tunnel connected directly with the smaller or "gambling" shack of the Pastime Club. When Bob shut off the light the lads could look out of the windows, and see the surface of Lake Netcong in the distance.

"Nobody's here," remarked Ned in a low voice.

Bob was making sure of this by casting the beam of light from his electric torch about the room. It showed tables and chairs, and on the former were scattered stacks of colored celluloid chips and many packs of cards.

"Looks like gambling all right," commented Ned.

"Um," said Bob, musingly. And then he uttered an exclamation as his torch flashed on a box in a corner. It was a box with slats instead of a solid piece of wood for a cover. Looking through the spaces between the cracks Ned saw something that caused him to cry:

"It's our golden eagle! Look, it's in that box! We've found it, Bob!"

The young detective was holding his light close to the slatted top. Ned leaned over eagerly, as though

to tear off part of the cover, but Bob stopped him with a gesture.

"No good!" he said, briefly.

"Why not?" demanded Ned. "Isn't that our golden eagle mascot?"

"No," answered Bob.

"Why not? It's a stuffed bird, isn't it?"

"Sure it is, but it has the wrong kind of feathers."

"Wrong kind of feathers—what do you mean?"

"I mean it has turkey feathers. That's a stuffed gobbler in that box."

"A—stuffed—gobbler!" faltered Ned.

And then, as this idea slowly filtered through his brain, and he tried to puzzle out what it meant, Bob suddenly shut off the light and, catching his chum by the arm, whispered in his ear:

"Cheese it! Some one's coming!"

CHAPTER XXI

STUMPY'S ALARM

WITH this alarm ringing in his ears, Ned turned to follow Bob out of the shack and along the tunnel which they had followed to reach the place of disappointment. For it was a disappointment to Ned, at least, to discover a stuffed turkey in a slatted crate where the lad had expected to find the mounted golden eagle.

Whether or not Bob was likewise disappointed there was no means of telling at the time. The boys were not anxious to be discovered, intruders as they were on the very premises of the Pastime Club.

"What d'you hear?" whispered Ned to his chum as they stumbled on in the almost total darkness of the tunnel, for Bob was holding a finger in front of the lens of his flash lamp, thus permitting only a little gleam to trickle through.

"Keep still!" was the rejoinder, and the lads raced on in the gloom.

Meanwhile, Harry and Stumpy were proceeding through the woods, intent on reaching the lonely cabin of the voodoo man, to help him if such action

was found necessary, otherwise to spy, in a measure, on what was going on—to learn the object of Sam and Jake in going to the place in response to the talk with the mysterious Herman Korth.

For Bob had quickly explained to his chums the nature of his suspicions against the queer scientist, and had voiced to them his alarm lest something happen to his friend the old colored man. Next to Bob, Stumpy was, perhaps, the lad most likely to be able to approach Old Hanson without exciting undue suspicion on his part.

"What do you think we'll find at Old Hanson's shack?" asked Harry as he trudged along beside Stumpy.

"Hanson," was the answer—that and nothing more, as Poe's raven would say.

"Hanson?" questioned Harry, wonderingly. "What do you mean? I asked you what you thought we'd find at his shack and you say 'Hanson.' I guess you—" And then a light broke on Harry. "Oh, you mean we'll find him there," chuckled the lad. "Sure! I see! Of course he'll be there—I didn't mean that. But what else?"

"Dunno," answered Stumpy, all in one word.

"Well, I guess you're right at that," mused Harry. "No telling what we may find. But I know one thing that'll be there—if Sam and Jake are around, and that one thing is—trouble."

"Um!" grunted the word-saving Stumpy.

And Harry let it go at that.

It was not very far from where Bob had so unexpectedly discovered the tunnel to the solitary slab-sided cabin where the old colored man lived. Had it been daylight, and had the two boys not been fearing a surprise, they could have made short work of the distance.

As it was they stumbled along in the gloom, each of them tripping and falling more than once. For the path was overgrown with tangled vines that caught on their feet, since the flashlight they carried was not a very satisfactory method of illumination.

Then, too, they wanted to proceed as quietly as possible, for they could not tell at what moment they might run into Sam, Jake, and, possibly, the mysterious Korth, though it was Bob's opinion that the hunter had told the two bullies what to do, and was going to leave it all to them.

"There I go again!" angrily muttered Harry as his foot caught in another vine. "Is this the fifth or tenth time, Stumpy, that I've tripped?" and Harry saved himself from a hard fall by extending his hands against a convenient tree.

"Tenth," ventured Stumpy, not that it made any difference. He had tripped also, but he said little about it, merely grunting.

So it was not until some little time had passed that the two boys finally found themselves on a com-

paratively clear path leading to the cabin of the old colored man.

"We're almost there now," observed Harry with a sigh of relief.

"Um," was all Stumpy replied. It might mean anything or nothing. Personally I think it was Stumpy's method of protesting about the useless talking of his chums. It wasn't really necessary for Harry to say anything.

They kept on, moving cautiously, and presently, as the moon peeped out from behind clouds that had hid her light earlier in the evening, the lads saw the cabin looming in front of them.

"There it is!" remarked Harry, again needlessly.

"Um," said Stumpy once more. "Duck!"

He did not mean, by this last exclamation, that he saw some variety of barnyard aquatic fowl. Rather it was a terse invitation to his companion to crouch down and so remain out of observation until they had a chance to discover "what was doing."

Harry understood this, and the two boys remained within sight of the cabin, but themselves hidden from view unless some one had been specially looking for them and had focused a light on them—neither of which contingencies came to pass.

The cabin of the voodoo man remained dark and silent. He might be within, perhaps in some room, the windows closely curtained, and there he might

have been concocting some nefarious philter designed to cure rheumatism, drive away the "misery," or ward off the evil eye. That is if some of the stories about the old chap were to be credited. More likely, as Harry reasoned it out, Old Hanson was asleep.

However, there was no light and no sound in his cabin, and Stumpy and his chum were silently debating what they had better do when, suddenly, the stillness of the night (that is, stillness if you except the chirping of the crickets and the song of the katydids) was broken by the unmistakable approach of some one toward the cabin.

There was the crackle of dry, brittle sticks under foot, the rustling of bushes and then the murmur of voices—two of them, it seemed.

"Here they are!" whispered Harry in Stumpy's ear.

"Um!" remarked the uncommunicative lad.

Remaining in their hiding place, and favored, now, by the brighter light of the moon, the two boys peered with eager eyes toward the still dark and silent cabin.

Then, as the breaking of twigs became louder, and the murmur of voices was more in evidence, Harry and Stumpy saw two burly figures approach the front door of the old shack.

"It's Sam and Jake," whispered Harry, who knew the forms.

Stumpy barely grunted an assent.

The two undesirable visitors marched boldly up to the cabin, and either kicked or pounded on the door. The echo of their blows was, for a time, the only answer.

"Come on, old man—open up!" commanded the harsh voice of Sam Watson—Harry knew his voice.

"Go 'way! Go on 'way!" sounded shrilly from the cabin, after another session of pounding and demanding, in which latter effort Jake Johnson joined.

"Open the door or we'll break it in!" grimly came the next command.

A shrill, almost unhuman cry, came from the old colored man, who must have been terror-stricken, thus suddenly aroused. This was followed by the sound of a shot, though whether fired from within or without the cabin the hidden ones could not tell. And then came a furious attack on the door—it seemed that Sam and Jake were kicking fiercely against it.

"They're going to break in!" said Harry to his chum.

"Sure!" assented Stumpy. "You stay—I'll go—get Bob!"

And without pausing to see whether this would meet with the approval of his chum, Stumpy ran off down the path in a crouching position, so as to remain unobserved. He was going to give the alarm to the young detective.

CHAPTER XXII

THE VOODOO

SEVERAL matters combined to give Harry, remaining in hiding near the old shack, cause for wonder. One was the quickness with which Stumpy had left him—the lad did not usually move with such speed. But this was an unusual occasion.

Another cause for wonder was Stumpy's unexpected use of words. Generally one, or, at the most, two, sufficed him. Now he had gone to the trouble of constructing a whole sentence, saying that he would go and give the alarm to Bob while Harry remained on watch.

"And I hope they all come back soon," mused Harry as he strained his ears to catch any sounds which might come from the cabin.

A third source of wonder was as to what was going to happen. Following that strange cry, after the brutal summons, and the shot, there had been silence.

"There's something doing up there, all right," mused Harry, "even if they are so quiet. "I wish Bob and the others would come."

Of all the puzzles connected with the matter, the one that gave the watcher most concern was what was going on. He could hear nothing from the cabin, but the door must have given way under the strenuous attack of the two bullies.

"But why don't they go in and get what they're after?" thought Harry. "He must have something that they want—or that Korth wants—and he's sent them to steal it. But why don't they go in and get it?"

The sudden silence, following the strange noises, was getting on Harry's nerves—that is, such nerves as a healthy lad of his age could be supposed to have.

Harry had half a notion to creep up and ascertain if he could see anything in the cabin, though it was still shrouded in darkness, when, suddenly, a light gleamed. And it came from within the shack. Immediately afterward the boy heard the sound of voices.

"They're inside—Sam and Jake—talking to Hanson," reasoned Harry. "I guess I can go up and see what's going on. They won't see or hear me now."

Harry, like most lads of his age, had played games where it was needful, to avoid being caught, or "tagged," to steal one's way along, sometimes close to an eager watcher. Using some of the methods gained in such sports, the lad began a cautious approach toward the cabin, wherein a light gleamed.

Harry managed to gain a window on the side, through which most of the light came, showing that the shade was farther up there, and, pausing a moment to see if he might, by any possibility, be attacked in the rear, he prepared to look in.

Though he knew only of the two bullies who were at the cabin, Harry was aware of the possibility that other members of the Pastime Club might be on their way to aid Sam and Jake. He did not want to be caught napping. So he gave a hasty look to the rear before approaching too close to the window.

The moon gave light enough to show him that there was no one in view, though the lad realized that some one might be crouching in the bushes as he had crouched.

"But I got to take a chance," mused Harry.

The voices were louder now, and Harry could distinguish words.

"Go 'way! Go 'way!" the colored man kept repeating. "Yo' got no call t' come heah!"

"We're here on business, Uncle!" laughingly answered Jake.

"We want what you've got here," went on the other. "You might as well give it up without a fuss, for we're going to take it anyhow!"

"They're going to rob him!" gasped Harry in a whisper.

Up to this time he had been unable to catch a glimpse of the aged slave because the window did

not give a full view of the room. But Harry could see Jake and Sam standing and looking toward a certain point, and he judged that this was where Old Hanson was—perhaps in the doorway of his bedroom.

Then, suddenly, the watching lad saw the old man, clad in a sort of robe made from an old crazy quilt, rush toward the middle of the room. In his hand he held a strange object—just what it was Harry could not guess.

"Go 'way, yo'! Go 'way!" ordered the black man. "Go 'way or I done put de voodoo on you! I voodoo yo' ef yo' don't go 'way!"

Watching, Harry saw Jake rather shrink back as the old man extended the strange object, holding it above his head.

But Sam, with a brutal laugh, stepped forward and cried:

"I'm not afraid of you or your voodoo work, Hanson. Come now, no more monkey business—give it up!"

And then, as Harry watched, there was enacted a strange scene. With all his heart he wished that Bob, Ned and Stumpy would come to the rescue.

Meanwhile, Stumpy was making the best speed he could back to the tunnel. He was familiar with the woods, but in the darkness, even with the flashlight Harry had let him take, and aided, as he was occa-

sionally, by the intermittent light of the moon, Stumpy found it hard work to make his way.

As it was, he slipped, stumbled and fell, more than once saving himself by putting forth his hands against friendly trees as the tangled vines tripped him.

And as Stumpy was hurrying toward the newly discovered end of the tunnel, to summon Bob and Ned to the cabin, those two latter lads were, in their turn, hurrying along the secret passage, to get away from some one whom they had heard in the "gambling shack," as they called it.

"I guess they aren't coming," said Ned to his chum when they thought they were nearing the place where Bob had toppled into the hole.

"Hope not," was the reply. "We've got enough on hand to-night without this."

"Do you really think that was a stuffed turkey in the box, and not our club eagle?" asked Ned, a little later.

"Sure it was a turkey," was the answer.

"What would they be doing with it?" was the next question.

"Give it up," Bob replied. "Maybe they want to have a mascot like ours, but enough different to make a joke of it."

"Maybe—but it's a queer idea," said Ned. "Well, here we are—out of the tunnel."

And, hardly had they emerged, running up the

slope down which, a little while ago, Bob had so unceremoniously tumbled, that Stumpy came running along, out of breath, but otherwise not much excited.

"Well—what's going on?" quickly demanded Bob.

"Lots—trouble!" was the answer. "They're there!"

"Who, Sam and Jake?"

"Yep!"

"Then that's the place for us!" exclaimed Bob. "Come on, Ned, we've got our work cut out for us!"

And, hardly pausing to let Stumpy get his breath back, the lads turned and rushed off in the darkness to the rescue of the old voodoo man.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE FIGHT

LED by Bob Dexter, his three chums, including Harry, who had been left on guard, prepared to rush into the hut of the old colored man and rescue him from the two bullies. Ned, Bob and Stumpy, who had rushed back to the tunnel to tell what was going on at the shack, had made good time returning to the home of the voodoo man.

They found Harry eagerly awaiting them.

"Has anything happened?" asked Bob eagerly. "Have they done anything to Old Hanson?"

"Not yet—he's holding them off—keeps telling them he's going to voodoo them—put the evil eye on them," reported Harry. "I sneaked up and looked in the window a couple of times. Old Hanson keeps shaking a queer thing at them—looks like a bunch of petrified snakes to me!"

"Snakes!" gasped Ned, holding back. He was very much afraid of reptiles.

" 'Tisn't snakes!" explained Bob. "I know what it is—it's just his magic tree root—he claims it works voodoo, but of course that's all bosh. It's

just a gnarled and twisted old tree root. And he's been shaking that at Sam and Jake; has he, Harry?"

"He sure has, and they're scared, too, but I guess they're going at him now. So that's only a twisted tree root, eh? Well, now I think of it, I guess you're right, Bob."

"This isn't any time for thinking!" tersely exclaimed the young detective. "We've got to do something. I guess Sam and Jake are getting over their fear of voodoo and they're hurting Old Hanson. Come on, fellows!"

A cry of fear and terror from the old colored man pierced the stillness of the night—it was a strange cry, scarcely human, it seemed, so weird was it, and Bob's three chums looked at each other—not that they could see much in the dark woods, illumined only by the fitful rays of the moon—but they seemed to gather courage from the glances.

"Don't let that cry worry you," spoke Bob, guessing what was on their minds. "Old Hanson always does that when he's working what he calls his voodoo. Come on, we'll spoil the game for those fellows!"

So he led the way toward the hut, from the open door of which a light now streamed. This gave the rescuers an objective point and they headed for it.

As Bob and his companions entered, they saw Sam and Jake holding in firm grasp the old and much-frightened colored man. One of the bullies had him

each by a wrist, and they were twisting his arms cruelly. Fallen to the floor was the queer object Harry and Stumpy had seen Old Hanson raise above his head—it was, as Bob said, the gnarled and twisted root of a tree, curiously colored either by nature or art.

"Come on now, old man—give up—where is it?" roughly demanded Sam, as the young detective and his forces entered.

"Go 'way! Go 'way! I done put de evil eye on yo'! I done shook de sacred root at yo'! I turn de root full on yo' an yo' suah got t' fade an' die! I done put de voodoo on yo', I has!"

"Don't make me laugh!" brutally rejoined Jake. "I'm not afraid of your voodoo work—it isn't any good. And before I die I'm going to get what I came for! Give him another twist, Sam!"

They turned the old man's arms, torturing him cruelly, and were at this point in their brutal work when Bob cried:

"That's enough. Let him alone!"

So intent were the two bullies on their purpose that they had not heard the boys enter, and their first intimation was when Bob gave the command. Sam and Jake wheeled quickly about, surprise on their faces. Doubtless they wondered how Bob had gotten free.

"Get out of here!" ordered Jake.

"What do you want?" demanded Sam.

"We want you to get out!" boldly replied Bob. "You're wanted back at the club house," he went on. "Better go through the tunnel," he added with an air of knowing more than he did.

"The tunnel!" gasped Jake. "Why, has that——"

"Shut up!" ordered Sam. "Don't you know you're giving away secrets?"

"We've got 'em now—the secrets of the tunnel and the stuffed turkey!" went on Bob. "Now you fellows vamoose out of here and let Hanson alone! You couldn't keep me and you can't keep him. Get out!"

"We will, like fun!" shouted Jake. "You fellows are going to get what's coming to you, all right, for butting in. Come on, Sam! We'll tackle them and fix this nigger later!"

As he spoke he dropped the negro's left wrist, an example followed a moment later by his crony. A look of relief at the cessation of pain passed over Old Hanson's face.

"Get ready, boy!" warned Bob. "There's going to be a fight!"

And a fight there was in that lonely cabin in the woods—a fight long remembered by those who took part in it. Even with the odds of numbers in favor of Bob and his chums, they had their work cut out for them from the start. For though two of them could attack each of the two bullies, Sam and Jake

were powerful and strong, and, not only that, but they were skilled in the art of boxing.

In consequence the first rather disorganized rush of Bob and Harry at Jake was met by that individual in a very scientific manner. With a neat right and left he sent Bob and his chum reeling back from the effects of the blows. Almost the same thing happened when Stumpy and Ned sailed in to Sam—he knocked Stumpy down, stunning him for a moment, and Ned's lip was cut by the cruel force of Sam's big fist.

But after the first rush Bob and his chums learned caution. Sam and Jake were smiling at what they thought was going to be an easy victory.

"We've got 'em on the run!" yelled Sam.

"Divide up—one in front and one behind!" ordered Bob, tersely.

This was instantly understood—it was the recognized manner of two smaller lads attacking one larger and stronger. And though in this case all the contestants were about of a size, the advantage was very much with the two bullies because both were fighters. They had indulged in many bouts at the Pastime Club.

With this change of tactics there was quite a different aspect to the fight now.

Lowering his head, and protecting himself as well as he could with his left arm raised over it, Bob sailed in toward Jake. At the same time Harry

moved about and, with a flying leap, landed on the bully's neck, twining his arms around his neck. And while Bob punched with his right hand, receiving in return some stunning blows, Harry was cutting off the wind of the fighter. This was too much for a lad of even Jake's prowess, and in a moment he went down in a heap under the combined attack.

"Punch him good now!" cried Bob, as he suited the action to his words, and Jake was given one of the worst beatings of his career.

At the same time Ned and Stumpy, taking pattern from Bob and his chum, were attacking Sam, and though he fought them both off for a longer time than Jake had succeeded in doing to his assailants, he too, eventually, went down with two fiercely fighting lads on top of him.

It was more a scene of well-merited punishment being visited on two bullies now than a fight, and the result can be guessed. Their eyes blackened, their faces cut and bleeding, their clothes torn, so fierce was the assault, Sam and Jake had only one thought now—to get away from the whirlwind of righteous anger they had roused.

"Quit! Quit!" abjectly begged Sam, rolling over and over on the floor. "We'll give up!"

"I've had enough!" thickly muttered Jake through his swollen and bleeding lips. He managed to escape from beneath Bob and Harry and staggered toward the door. Sam, with a whimpering cry, followed.

Bob and his chums arose and watched the retreat of the bullies.

Out into the darkness ran the two—they had been well beaten. Though they had despised their antagonists, they had been unmercifully manhandled and by lads with no real fistic skill.

"Whew, that was a fight!" gasped Ned, staggering about.

"Your nose is bleeding!" advised Harry.

"Guess I know it," retorted his chum. "Where's some water? Get me some water, Hanson!"

"Hanson's gone!" declared Stumpy sententiously. He, too, was engaged in stopping the flow of blood, though his came from a cut on his forehead.

"Gone?" exclaimed Bob. "Hanson gone?" He had been so busy fighting that he had not noticed the quiet slipping away of the voodoo man.

"Sure he's gone," went on Stumpy, putting his hand to his forehead and looking at the blood which it came back smeared with. "He lit out early in the game."

"He might have stayed and given us a hand," spoke Ned with a trifle of grievance in his voice.

"Oh, Hanson isn't that kind," chuckled Harry. "Anyhow I'm just as glad he didn't sail in and help us."

"So am I," added Ned. "It wouldn't have been much credit to us if we'd had to have Hanson help us lick those fellows. And we did lick 'em all right."

"I'll broadcast to the world we did," laughed Harry.

"They won't be back in a hurry," declared Stumpy, as he noted that the flow of blood from his cut was slackening. "We gave them all that was coming to 'em."

"Burr-r-r! Ouch!" exclaimed Harry, and a spasm of pain crossed his face as he limped across the cabin floor.

"What's the matter?" asked Bob.

"Twisted my ankle—hope it isn't sprained!" was the reply. Harry staggered and would have fallen, but, putting out his hand against the wall, he saved himself.

And then a surprising thing happened. For that part of the wall against which Harry struck his hand rather sharply seemed to slide back, revealing an opening—a small recess, or closet, near the fireplace. And within that recess, before the astonished eyes of the lads, stood on their pedestals—two golden eagles!

CHAPTER XXIV

STARTLING NEWS

STRANGE events had followed so closely on the heels of queer happenings that night, and strenuous actions had such startling sequences, that it is no wonder the sight of two golden eagles—one the club mascot, the boys were certain—added but little to their astonishment. Still there was some measure of this, for, at the sight of the staring birds of prey, with their glaring, yellow eyes, Ned exclaimed:

"Look!"

"Is this voodoo work?" Harry wanted to know.

"He's hypnotized us—Old Hanson has hypnotized us!" declared Stumpy, this being one of the longest utterances ever made by him. He was almost ready to run from the shack, so really frightened was he, when Bob caught his arm, pulled him back and exclaimed:

"Hypnotized nothing! Those birds are real!"

"Guess Stumpy was thinking Old Hanson worked a trick like the magicians do in India when they make you think you see a man go up a rope that is fastened

only in the clouds," remarked Harry. "Is that it, Stumpy?"

"Um!" was the only answer, and the queer lad returned to his usual method of communication.

But still all four youths remained staring at the strange sight, revealed when Harry had, unwittingly, touched the concealed spring which operated a sliding panel that hid from view a concealed recess in the wall. This is what really had taken place, as they learned later.

"There's our golden eagle, sure enough!" cried Ned, advancing for a closer view. "Did you know it was here, Bob?"

What a chance for Bob to have covered himself with glory at the expense, at most, of a little dissimulation or camouflaging! He had but to pretend that he expected something to be discovered at the cabin of the old slave, and his reputation would be greatly enhanced.

But Bob was a square, true lad. No deceit for him, and, strong as was the temptation to so easily gain a reputation, he put it aside.

"I'm as much surprised as any of you," he asserted truthfully. "I thought maybe something queer might be going on here, and I thought Hanson had something Korth wanted to get possession of, but I never dreamed it was our eagle—let alone *two* birds. One of these must belong to Korth, and Hanson got it in some way. That's what Korth

wanted to get back—his own golden eagle. And, by the same token, I must have taken his own property that night I was in his house."

"Say, what is this, anyhow?" demanded Ned, "a Chinese puzzle?"

"Begins to look that way," admitted Harry.

Stumpy was looking in the secret opening. He had reached out a hand to draw one of the mounted eagles out when a noise at the door attracted the attention of the four boys.

At first they thought it might be the two bullies, returning with reënforcements, and they had some notion that the voodoo man, his fright over, might be coming back.

But, to the further surprise of all, there came bursting into the cabin the unsavory Martin Sill. There was a queer look on the unpopular lad's face —a look of wonder that increased when he was confronted by Bob and his three chums. But Martin had his mouth open to say something, even before he saw the four friends, it seemed, and he went through with his performance.

"I'll put it back! I'll put it back!" he exclaimed. "Give it to me, Hanson, and I'll put it back where I got it!"

Then he seemed aware that the old colored man wasn't in the cabin. But confronting him were the two lads he had fastened in the old mill earlier that

day—a day that, with its night, was filled with action.

Seeing that he had blurted out something he had not intended these lads to hear, Martin turned and would have beaten a quick retreat, but Ned caught him by the arm.

"No, you don't!" cried Ned. "You aren't going to get away until we get something out of you!"

"And pay you back for what you did to us!" added Harry. "Hold him tight, Ned!"

"Don't worry! He can't get away!" was the answer.

Martin was now thoroughly frightened.

"I'll tell everything!" he whimpered. "I didn't damage it any. I just took it for a joke—to get even! I'll put it back!"

"Do you mean our eagle or Korth's?" demanded Bob, and his chums seemed content to let him solve the puzzle now—if it could be solved.

"I don't know anything about Korth," mumbled Martin. "I took the golden eagle from your club house and——"

For the first time he seemed aware that there were *two* mounted birds, and his eyes grew round and big with wonder as he viewed them both when Stumpy, taking them from the secret recess, set them on Old Hanson's table.

"Two of 'em—two!" murmured Martin. "What's it all about?"

"Which one did you take?" asked Harry.

"I didn't know you had two," went on the pest. "I only took the one—the one over the president's chair in the club house."

"And you stole the trophies, and broke the cups, did you?" fiercely demanded Ned.

"No! No! I didn't do that! I didn't do that!" earnestly cried Martin. "It was done before I got there! I only took the golden eagle for a joke. I hid it in the woods and was going to leave it there, to get square with you fellows for putting me out of the club. But my father heard about it—Tad Bundy told him, I guess, 'cause Tad is mad at me now, and my father made me come back and get the eagle."

"Look here!" cried Bob, striving to get some leading thread out of the tangle. "You say you hid this eagle you took from our club house in the woods. Then why did you come directly to Hanson's cabin to get it? How did you know it was here?"

"'Cause I saw it here one day last week," admitted Martin. "After I hid it in the woods I missed it—for I used to come out nearly every day to see if it was safe—and one day it was gone, and I saw Old Hanson puttering around there. I guessed he took it and I sneaked up and looked in his cabin. He had it here, and I knew he'd keep it better than I could. It might have got spoiled out in the hole where I

hid it. So that's how I knew Hanson had it and I came for it."

Bob and his chums were beginning to understand some of the ends of the puzzle, but much yet remained to be cleared. And Martin had said he had nothing to do with the vandalism that was responsible for the broken and stolen trophies. Who, then, was at the bottom of this? There was work still for the detective genius of Bob Dexter.

"I guess you'd better come down to the club house with us, Martin, and make a clean breast of it," advised Bob. "I don't want to take the responsibility of acting alone. You come with us."

"Oh, I don't want to!" was the whining answer. "You got your mascot back—it isn't hurt any—take it and let me go. Tell my father I gave it back to you!" He tried to sneak away, but was held.

"We've got to go further into this thing," declared Bob. "You come down to the club with us, Martin. Come on, fellows, take the golden eagle—take ours—and we'll go."

"What about the other—whose is it?" asked Harry.

"I don't know," frankly admitted Bob. "Maybe it's Korth's and maybe it's Old Hanson's. If he would come back——"

"Some one's coming now," remarked Harry.

Approaching footsteps were audible down the path that led to the old shack, and a moment later

there entered two men. One was Herman Korth, who seemed perfectly at ease and indifferent to the sharp and somewhat scowling look of Bob Dexter.

The other man was Harrison Thornton, the sarcastic honorary member of the Boys' Athletic Club.

Gasps of surprise passed the lips of Harry and Ned as Mr. Korth exclaimed:

"There's your golden eagle, Mr. Thornton, just as I told you we would find it. And there's the lad responsible for taking it!"

Bob noticed, however, that when the man made this assertion he did not indicate any certain lad. The eyes of Ned, Harry and Stumpy were turned on the young detective. Evidently they wanted some explanation from him as to this latest turn of events. And Bob was ready.

"Yes, Mr. Thornton," he said, "here is the golden eagle—our club's mascot—and another eagle also. Perhaps Mr. Korth can explain how a golden eagle came to be in his house, and how it was taken away from me when I tried to bring it back to the club."

"Oh, yes, young man, I can explain very easily," was the answer. "And perhaps you will explain what prompted you to take the golden eagle in the first place, with the hope that a reward would be offered and that you could get it. Can you explain that?"

There was no question now as to whom Mr.

Korth meant. He was pointing straight at Bob Dexter.

Gasps of surprise on the part of Bob's three chums greeted this startling news. But Bob remained cool—even smiling.

"I didn't take the eagle from the club house—but some one here did, Mr. Thornton," said the young detective. "I know who it was. But what I *don't* know is why Mr. Korth is interfering in this matter. Who is he, anyhow? Who is this mysterious Mr. Korth?"

"He's a detective whom I engaged to solve this mystery," was the chuckling answer of Harrison Thornton. "Whether or not he's solved it, I don't know—but he's my detective—Gilman Riker is the name he works under," and at the mention of this Bob started and a queer look came over his face.

CHAPTER XXV

HAPPY DAYS

CHARACTERISTIC it was of Bob Dexter that, as soon as he found he was somewhat in the wrong, to admit it. He had no sooner heard the announcement of Mr. Thornton, than the young detective stepped toward the other man and said:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Riker. I didn't know who you were, or what you were doing, or I'd never have entered your house that night. I guess I made a mistake, thinking you had something to do with the taking of our club's golden eagle."

"Oh, well, we all make mistakes," said the famous detective, easily. "That's why they put rubbers on the end of lead pencils, you know. And I did have something to do with the golden eagle, though of course I didn't take it."

"Of course not," agreed Bob. "But I'm glad to know you—that is glad to know who you really are. I've heard about you."

"So've I!" admitted Ned, and indeed all the lads knew the name of Gilman Riker, who had to his

credit the solution of some very strange crimes and mysteries.

"You haven't anything on me, in the matter of mistakes," went on Mr. Korth, or, as he was better known as, Mr. Riker. "I thought you took the golden eagle, Bob. That's why I made your acquaintance and had you guide me up the mountain."

"Then it was all a fake, you wanting to shoot a golden eagle?" asked the young detective.

"Not altogether, no. I am somewhat of a scientist, in spite of working as a detective at times, and I wanted to see if I could get one of the big birds. But if you didn't take the club's mascot to hold for a possible reward, Bob, who did?"

"Martin Sill," was the answer. "He just confessed when we came here to save Old Hanson from the two bullies you set on him," and Bob's tone was a trifle bitter as he remembered the agony of the old man.

"Did those scoundrels annoy him?" asked Mr. Riker fiercely. "I'll fix them for that! I told them to be gentle, and if they couldn't get what they wanted to come away. The young desperadoes!"

"Oh, they got what was coming to them, all right!" chuckled Ned.

"And a bit more," added Harry.

"I thought you lads looked as though you had been in a fight," commented Mr. Thornton. "But

what did you expect to find up here that you sent Sam and Jake after Old Hanson?" he inquired.

"A golden eagle," was the answer. "The old slave had a stuffed one almost the exact duplicate of your club mascot. I had sent my black helper, Bora, to get the loan of it for a time, soon after you engaged me on this case, Mr. Thornton.

"Bora and Hanson, it seems, belong to the same voodoo lodge, if there are such things, so my man had no trouble in borrowing Hanson's stuffed golden eagle. I had it in my house the night you paid me such an unexpected visit, Bob," went on the great detective. "I was going to put it back in the club house and watch the surprise on your face when you saw it. I looked to startle you into a confession. But when you took it away Bora saw you, and, following you in the dark, took it away from you."

"So it was Bora that gave me the blow on the head, was it?" asked Bob, rubbing his skull with a rueful memory.

"Yes, though he really didn't mean to, and I scolded him for it," said Mr. Riker. "You were quite a puzzle to me, Bob—with your queer ways—and after I first formed the theory that you had taken the eagle I couldn't reconcile your visit to my house.

"While you were there, and after I had told you to go, Bora brought me unexpected news that at Old Hanson's cabin was *another* golden eagle. My serv-

ant heard this from another member of the voodoo fraternity, I believe, who came with this information while you were going. I left in a hurry, not understanding how the club eagle—for such I guessed it to be—could get in the old man's cabin—and it must have been then that you took the opportunity of walking away with the one I had borrowed from Hanson."

"Say, I don't understand this at all!" said Ned.

"It is a bit hard," admitted Mr. Riker. "But suppose we start from the beginning. You say you took the golden eagle from the club house, and hid it in the woods for revenge; is that right, Martin?" and he looked at the uncomfortable pest.

"Yes, I did that, but I didn't have anything to do with breaking the cups or stealing the trophies. That was done before I got there. And I didn't hurt your old flivver, either," he said to Harry. "I left it near the old mill."

"We'll pass that for a time," said Mr. Riker. "You took the eagle, Martin, and hid it in the woods. Then Bob began his detective work, and, soon after that, Mr. Thornton engaged me to work on the case."

"I didn't think much of your abilities, Bob, I'm frank to say," admitted the honorary club member. "But now I have to beg your pardon. You beat Riker and me at our own game—you found the

golden eagle, and I'll take back all I ever said against you."

"That's all right," and Bob laughed easily. He could afford to. For had he not gotten ahead of one of the most famous detectives in the world? Of course a great deal of it was chance, but then chance must be reckoned with in detective work.

"Very well," resumed Mr. Riker. "Martin, having taken the eagle, hid it in the woods. Then, as you tell me, it was taken away by Old Hanson. Doubtless he thought it was his own which had been taken as a joke, and he was probably much surprised when he found he had two birds instead of one."

"But how did he have *two,* if your servant Bora had borrowed one—Hanson's own stuffed eagle?" asked Ned.

"I'm coming to that," said Mr. Riker. "After Bob tried to run off with the eagle I had borrowed of Hanson, to use as a sort of surprise, Hanson and Bora had a quarrel—over some voodoo business, I suppose, and Hanson came and got his own eagle back. As I very much needed it, or thought I did, I cast about for a way of borrowing it again.

"I couldn't send Bora, as he and Hanson were on the outs. Then, by chance, I fell in with two members of the Pastime Club—Sam and Jake. I was not at all deceived as to their true character, but I did not suppose them to be as brutal as they were.

"They told me they were on friendly terms with

Hanson, and could get him to do anything for them. So I asked them to go up there and borrow his eagle again. I still wanted to carry out my original plans of putting it in the club house in place of the one I supposed you had taken, Bob. I told Sam and Jake I would meet them at their club house later, and I left them to get me the stuffed eagle."

"So that's why you told them to bring back the bird," asked Bob.

"Oh, you were trailing us rather closer than I thought," chuckled Mr. Riker, "to have heard that. But those were my instructions. I never supposed they would use force when Hanson refused to let them have what they came after. Another mistake of mine.

"And I have only myself to blame," proceeded Mr. Riker, "for Purdy told me not to trust those fellows."

"Purdy!" gasped Bob. "Is Mr. Purdy—the Punch and Judy man—is he——"

"He's my helper on this case," said Mr. Riker, smiling. "A good showman in the bargain. It was his idea that he could pick up some clews traveling around as a Punch and Judy man, and I told him to do it. He has been of great assistance to me, though I thought, at one time, you were suspicious of him," and he smiled at Bob.

"I was," the young detective admitted, "but not

in that way. I never dreamed he was working for you."

"Nor I," chorused Ned and Harry.

"And is Ponjo really his dog?" Bob wanted to know.

"He really is. You can talk to him yourself, for I think he is coming here now. Yes, here he is."

Mr. Riker glanced out of the door of the shack, and the boys, following his gaze, beheld the bald-headed, blue-eyed man, this time without his Punch and Judy outfit. But following him was the poodle dog, not, however, wearing coat and trousers.

"Hello, boys," greeted Mr. Purdy. "Got any more dried herring for Ponjo?" and he laughed heartily. "Sorry I had to take you in," he told Bob, "but—orders from the boss, you know."

"I know," admitted Bob, grinning a bit sheepishly. "Are there any more cards up your sleeve, Mr. Riker?" he asked.

"No, I think not," was the answer. "We are at the end of the mystery now," and he stooped over to pick up the poodle, who seemed as friendly with him as with the bald-headed man. Resuming, Mr. Riker said:

"The rest of the story you boys know as well as I do. All I need to add is that this evening Mr. Thornton had asked me to come to his house to report progress. I said I would do better than that

—that I would make the taker of the eagle confess. I came up here to see how Sam and Jake were succeeding and—well, we found you," and he motioned to Bob and his chums.

"I guess it's all over now—but the shouting," remarked Bob, with a smile. "Of course we haven't found the stolen cups, nor found out who did the damage. Martin says he——"

"I didn't do it, I tell you!" and the pest was on the verge of tears.

"Maybe Old Hanson, or Marietta Bobb could explain that," suggested Harry. "We saw you going off with Old Marietta one day, Bob, and we couldn't figure out what it was."

"Oh, that—it was only her frog!" and the young detective laughed. "She thought Hanson had taken it for some of his voodoo work and she was going to his place and raise all sorts of a row. I persuaded her Hanson had nothing to do with it."

"And did you—er—trace her frog, my friendly rival?" asked Mr. Riker.

"Yes, Martin's friend Tad had it," answered Bob.

"He isn't a friend of mine any more!" spoke Martin vindictively. "He squealed on me about the eagle—told my dad!"

"And a good thing he did, you young reprobate!" said Mr. Thornton angrily.

"You and Tad were friendly enough when you

shut me and Harry in the old mill," said Ned. "That was only this afternoon!"

"That was before I knew what he'd done," Martin said. "Honest, I didn't do a thing at the club house except take the eagle. I knocked it down off the shelf with an oar."

"Bob said an oar was used!" exclaimed Stumpy, somewhat excitedly—that is, for him.

"Do you think Old Hanson may know something of the matter? Where has he gone?" asked Mr. Thornton. "We ought to get to the bottom of this mystery."

"Old Hanson skipped out when we were fighting Sam and Jake," explained Harry.

"He's back!" broke in Stumpy, and the voodoo man, with many an apprehensive glance behind him, entered his shack. If he was surprised at seeing so much company he did not show it, nor did he seem puzzled at finding the two eagles taken from their secret hiding place. He looked about until he found the gnarled, strange root with which he had threatened the bullies and a look of relief came over his face.

"You're all right now, Hanson—they've gone," said Bob. "And, if you don't mind, we'll take our eagle and leave you yours."

"I ain't nebber done gwine t' let my eagle go out no mo'!" declared old Hanson emphatically, as he

put in the secret compartment his bird, almost an exact duplicate of the club mascot save in the pedestal on which it stood. Later it developed that the same taxidermist had prepared both specimens.

There was still quite a crowd of members in the headquarters of the Boys' Athletic Club when Bob and his companions, including Detective Riker and Mr. Thornton, entered a little later, Bob proudly carrying the golden eagle. Old Hanson had been left behind in his shack with his own specimen. Before the party left, the old colored man said the secret compartment had been there when he took possession of the shack—and he had used it, with more or less effect, in his voodoo work for the "benefit" of some of his superstitious colored friends.

"Whoopee! Bob's got our mascot back!" cried Fred Merton as he caught sight of the golden bird, little the worse for its adventures.

"Good for you, Bob!" yelled Charlie McGill.

"I knew he'd find it!" declared Joe Wright. "Now who says Bob isn't a full-fledged detective?"

"There are others," murmured the lad, with a glance at Mr. Riker.

Martin Sill had been allowed to go, with the threat that he would be dealt with later should circumstances seem to call for it.

"Gentlemen of the Boys' Athletic Club!" began Harvey Thomas in his usual formal manner, when

the excitement had somewhat calmed down. "We shall at once hold a special meeting and take suitable action on this happy occasion!"

"Oh, cut out the formal stuff!" murmured Tom Wilson.

"Get down to brass tacks!" murmured Charlie.

"Or ice cream," added Ned.

"And cake," came from Harry.

"Gentlemen, we must have some sort of order," spoke Harvey in a cold and formal voice. He was a great stickler for the formalities was Harvey Thomas. Meetings must be conducted according to a cut and dried plan. "Unless you come to order," he went on, "we cannot take suitable action at this session."

"Bob Dexter took all the action that was necessary," sang out some one in the back of the room. "He got our mascot back."

"Yes, he did," admitted Harvey, vainly banging with the gavel at the outburst of laughter which followed the sally. "And it is to properly thank our distinguished fellow member that I ask you to come to order and to listen to what he will tell us."

"This makes it a horse of another color," exclaimed Harry. "Quiet fellows!"

His appeal did more than the injunctions of the president, and at last, after a few more interruptions, the boys quieted down.

Well, there was a meeting—of a sort—but in the main it was given over to the story Bob told, aided here and there by Ned and Harry, Stumpy putting in an occasional word—but only a word.

"Now if we only knew who wrecked our place, as surely as we know who took the mascot," said Fred Merton, gazing at the eagle, restored to its accustomed place, "we'd be all right."

It was several days after this, though, before that secret was solved. And it came about when Bob entered the club house, and placed on a table, in front of his surprised fellow members, several battered silver trophies—the fruits of athletic victories.

"Our cups!" cried Charlie McGill. "Where'd you find 'em!"

"Out in the Rats' Nest," answered the young detective. "The police raided the place last night, and I was looking it over this morning, and poking around, when, buried in one of the shacks, I found these. It was tramps that raided our club house."

And so it proved. The "Rats' Nest" was the picturesque name given to a lonely glen where tramps were in the habit of congregating. There they lived in shacks made of sheets of rusty tin nailed over old packing boxes, and there they cooked such informal meals as they got. Now and then the place was raided by the Cliffside police, and the tramps went to jail. It was after one of these raids that

Bob, with an idea in his head something might come of it, visited the "Nest." There he found most of the stolen trophies, some badly damaged, and others intact. A few were missing, sold, probably, by the tramps who raided the club house.

That it was tramps who broke into the place was proved when one of the arrested ones confessed. They had hoped to find money and, in their disappointment, laid waste the place, also wrecking Tim Donnelly's refreshment booth. Departing before dawn, taking away with them many silver cups, the tramps left the place open, and it was an easy matter for Martin to slip in and take the eagle. When he saw the full extent of the vandalism, and realized what a stir it had caused, he was afraid to confess his part in it. But he told Tad, and Tad, in a moment of anger because Martin wouldn't let him run Harry's flivver, told Martin's father.

"There are still some things I don't understand," remarked Charlie McGill, and some of the other club members. "Of course it was Sam and Jake who tied you up, Bob, 'cause you were following them?"

"Yes, they did it, but I didn't stay tied long, and I guess I surprised them by appearing on the scene so suddenly. Finding their tunnel was another surprise. The Pastime fellows had kept pretty quiet about that."

"What do you reckon their idea was in having a stuffed turkey in their shack?" asked Ned.

"I think they wanted to make fun of our mascot," spoke Bob, "or else they thought to fool us into thinking they had our bird."

"Where do you imagine Hanson got his stuffed eagle, so like ours?" inquired Harry.

This was more or less of a puzzle, for the old slave was very secretive about it. It was surmised, though, that it had been given him, perhaps by his former owners, or by some one of the family. However, there was nothing certain about this. The same taxidermist who had prepared the trophy for Mr. Sanbarth had also stuffed the one Hanson had in his cabin, mounting the two birds nearly exactly alike, but this taxidermist had died and the secret died with him.

"Do you s'pose Sam and Jake meant you to be caught in the trap, that time you were, Bob?" asked Ned.

"No, that was pure accident. Of course they may have set the trap there to keep intruders away, and I just blundered into it. That was chance."

"Same as the fire was at their club house," ventured Harry.

"No, that wasn't chance!" said Bob quickly. "I set that fire!"

"You did!" cried his club chums, startled by his calm admission.

"Yes, I wanted a chance to get in their shack, and

I thought I could do it during the excitement of a fire. So I got some slow-burning chemical powder and a fourth of July fuse and hid it in the bushes. It would only make a lot of red fire and smoke—it couldn't set anything ablaze, I knew, or I'd never have chanced it. The thing went off all right—not just when I planned for it—but near enough. However, I didn't discover anything, for the reason that the Pastime fellows had nothing to do with the mystery, though I suspected them for a time. I was afraid I'd be discovered in connection with that fire, as I lost my knife out there."

"Is that the one Stumpy found?" asked Harry.

"Yes. But so much happened right about then that none of you fellows thought to question me about it, for which I was glad."

"Then this is the end of the mystery, I guess," remarked Joe Wright, waving his hand toward the restored golden eagle.

"Yes, it's all over now," said Bob, as he looked at his find.

"Thanks to you," added Harry. "Happy days, old man! Happy days!"

And they followed, for with the return to its place of the club mascot there was resumed a winning streak on the part of the club's nine which had fallen woefully back for some reason or other.

Bob, in spite of his protests, was given a dinner by the club, in which Mr. Thornton and other hon-

orary members joined, and Mr. Riker was a special guest. He and Bob became good friends, and later this eminent sleuth helped Bob on many cases.

For our young friend, gratified by the success which had come to him, went on in his work. And it was not long before his skill was called on in another case, as I shall relate to you in the next book of this series, to be called "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery; or, The Wreck of the Sea Hawk."

"I really shouldn't take this reward," said Bob, at the dinner, when Mr. Sanbarth insisted on presenting him with the check. "I didn't find the golden eagle all by myself. Harry helped—so did Ned and Stumpy."

"Then divide it!" suggested Mr. Sanbarth, looking at the golden eagle, restored to its place, and his memory dwelt tenderly on his dead son.

"Sure I'll divide it!" cried Bob. "Come up here, Ned, Harry and Stumpy, and share in the honors."

"Three cheers for Bob Dexter—the best little detective we ever had!" called Tom Wilson, and the voices of the eager and joyous lads echoed through the club house, to the cynical discomfiture of Sam and Jake, who were passing on their way to a meeting in their own headquarters.

THE END

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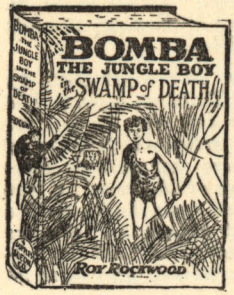

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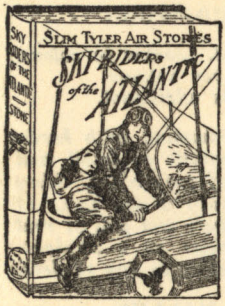

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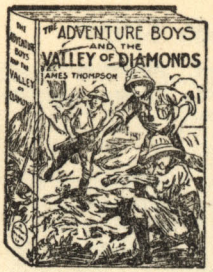

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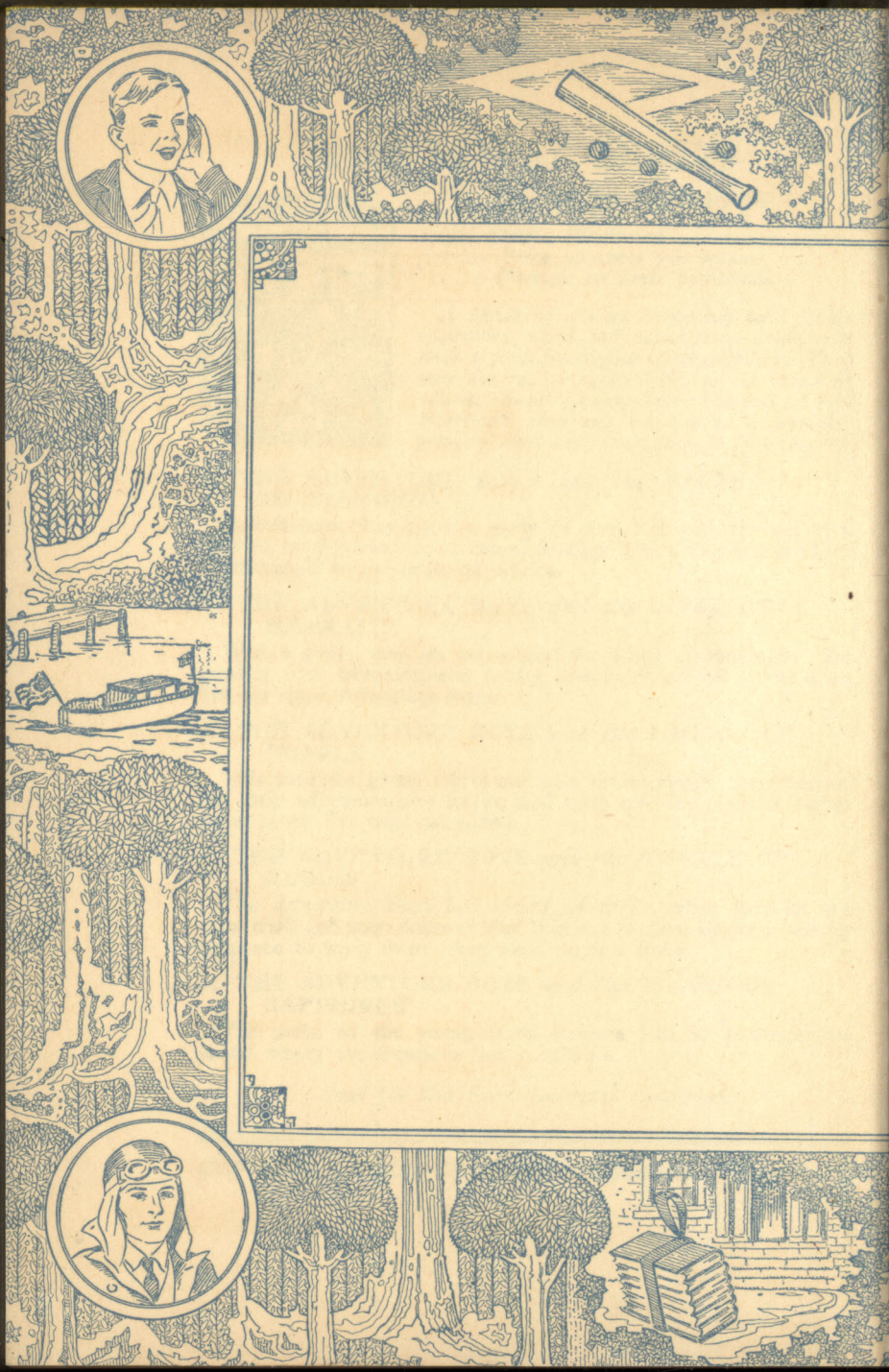

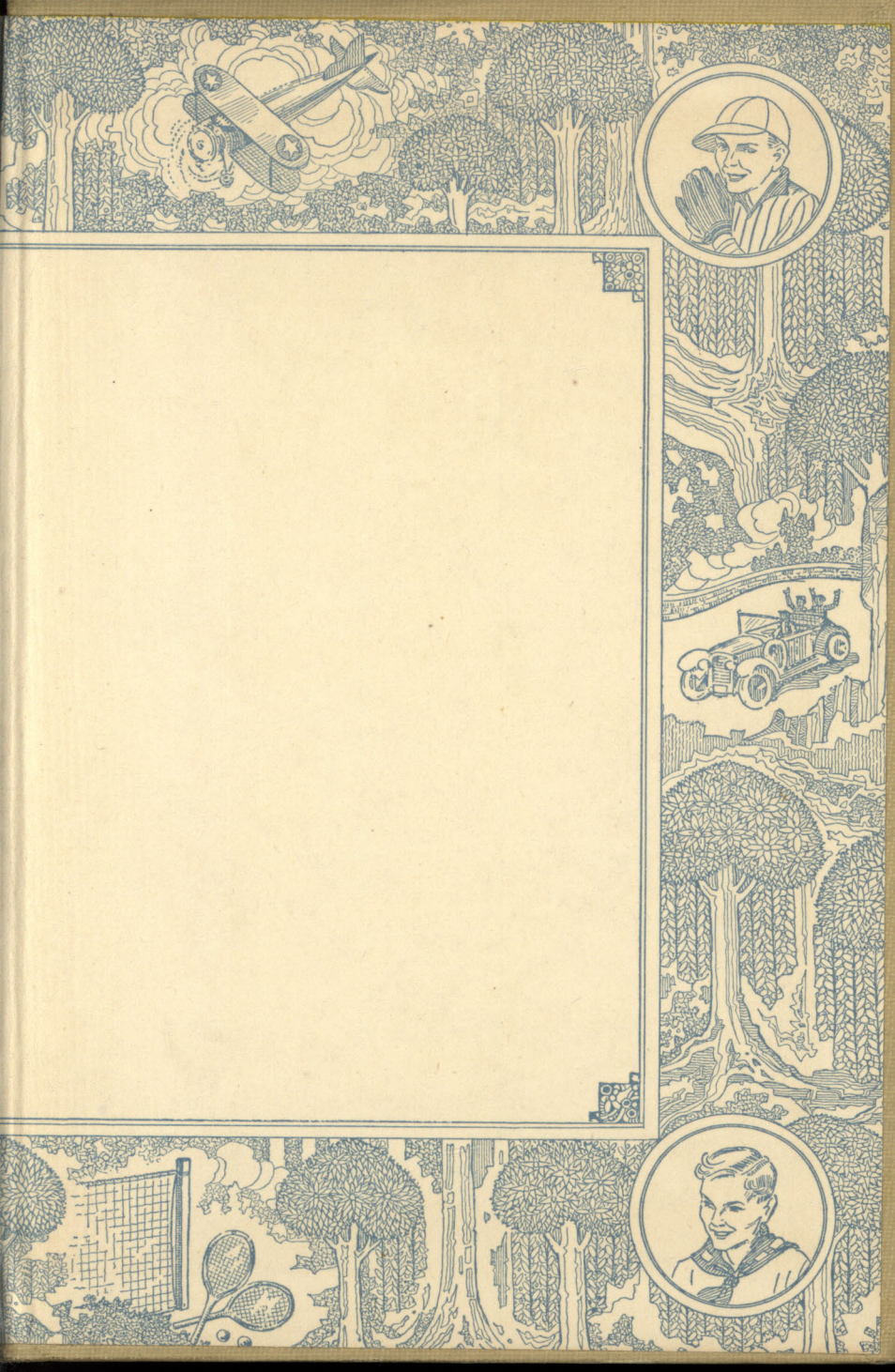

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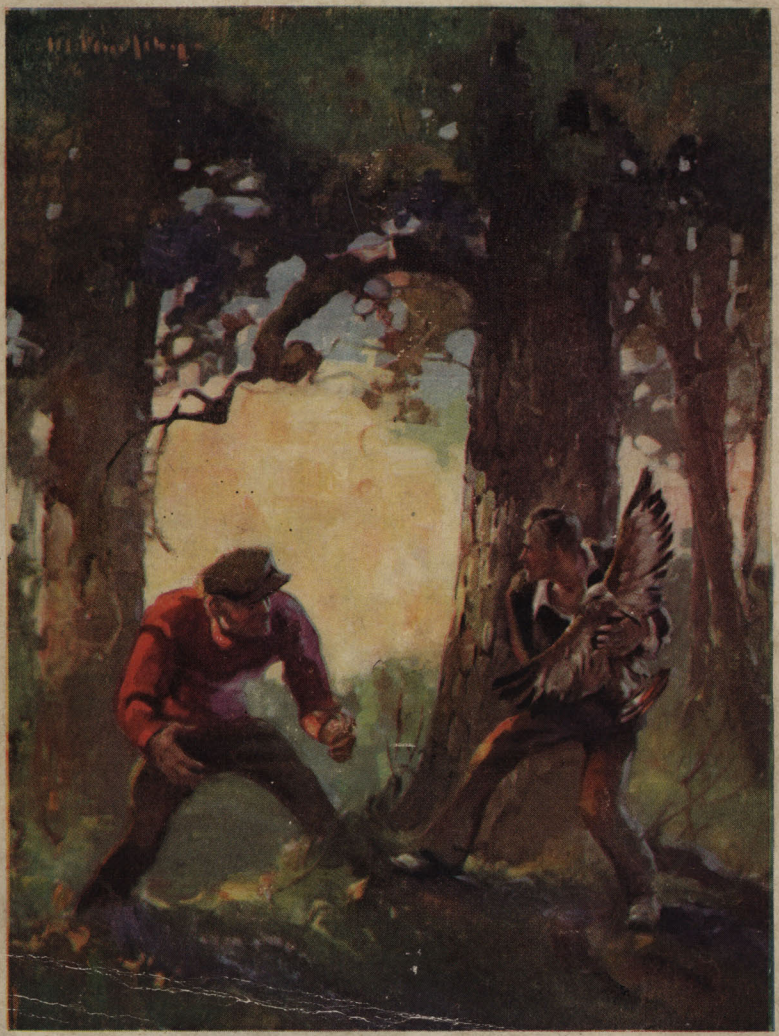

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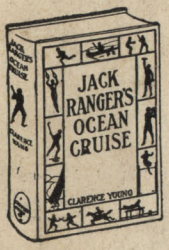

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SOMEONE SPRANG AT HIM FROM OUT OF THE DARKNESS.

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Page 125

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OR

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By

WILLARD F. BAKER

Author of "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery," "Bob Dexter and the Storm Mountain Mystery," "The Boy Ranchers," "The Boy Ranchers in Camp," etc.

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Visit from Vandals	1
II.	The Golden Eagle	12
III.	In Disguise	21
IV.	Old Marietta	33
V.	A Call for Help	45
VI.	Flickering Flames	63
VII.	The Man with the Gun	71
VIII.	On the Bike Trail	80
IX.	The Lonely House	87
X.	Bob Is Caught	101
XI.	Golden Feathers	109
XII.	An Attack in the Dark	116
XIII.	Captives	126
XIV.	Bob Shadows	148
XV.	Strange Talk	156
XVI.	Hempen Bonds	163
XVII.	Stumpy to the Rescue	170

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XVIII.	Bob's Escape	176
XIX.	A Strange Discovery	184
XX.	Wrong Feathers	197
XXI.	Stumpy's Alarm	205
XXII.	The Voodoo	211
XXIII.	The Fight	217
XXIV.	Startling News	225
XXV.	Happy Days	233

BOB DEXTER AND THE CLUB HOUSE MYSTERY

CHAPTER I

A VISIT FROM VANDALS

"THINK we're going to beat them, Harry?"

"Sure we are, Ned! Why, it will be a walk-over!"

Ned Fuller looked at his curly-haired chum and laughed a full, ringing peal of merriment that echoed back and forth in the patch of woods through which the boys were journeying. A light breeze, blowing across beautiful Lake Netcong, fanned the faces of the lads.

"What are you giggling at?" demanded Harry Pierce. "Got a funny paper stuck in one of your pockets?"

"Funny papers? No, I was laughing at you! You're funny enough!"

"How come?" and Harry caught Ned by the arm and playfully drew back his fist, pretending to be about to strike him.

"Your saying that our *rowing* race with the Net-

orary members joined, and Mr. Riker was a special guest. He and Bob became good friends, and later this eminent sleuth helped Bob on many cases.

For our young friend, gratified by the success which had come to him, went on in his work. And it was not long before his skill was called on in another case, as I shall relate to you in the next book of this series, to be called "Bob Dexter and the Beacon Beach Mystery; or, The Wreck of the Sea Hawk."

"I really shouldn't take this reward," said Bob, at the dinner, when Mr. Sanbarth insisted on presenting him with the check. "I didn't find the golden eagle all by myself. Harry helped—so did Ned and Stumpy."

"Then divide it!" suggested Mr. Sanbarth, looking at the golden eagle, restored to its place, and his memory dwelt tenderly on his dead son.

"Sure I'll divide it!" cried Bob. "Come up here, Ned, Harry and Stumpy, and share in the honors."

"Three cheers for Bob Dexter—the best little detective we ever had!" called Tom Wilson, and the voices of the eager and joyous lads echoed through the club house, to the cynical discomfiture of Sam and Jake, who were passing on their way to a meeting in their own headquarters.

THE END